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JÉPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER
AND OTHER POEMS

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

AND

OTHER POEMS

BY

EDWARD HENRY PEMBER



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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	PAGE
JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER, A TRAGEDY	1
<i>WRITTEN TO A TYROLESE MELODY.</i>	105
NOTES IN TRAVEL: 1904	107
THE DEATHBED OF LEONARDO DA VINCI	137
<i>TO A NIGHTINGALE IN JUNE</i>	158
BLOTTED LIVES	161
OLD AGE	181
SONGS:	
<i>A CRADLE SONG</i>	189
<i>EVENING</i>	192
<i>MOBILE E DIFFICILE.</i>	194
<i>EYES</i>	196
<i>THE WASP</i>	197
<i>LOVE'S DAY</i>	199
<i>DESERTED</i>	200
<i>A DREAM</i>	201
FAREWELL TO THE WETTERAU	202
<i>THE SINGER'S MISSION.</i>	206
SUB FINE LABORUM	207

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER,

A

TRAGEDY

IN THREE ACTS.

B



ARGUMENT.

IF any one were to object to this play on the ground that no modern dramatist ought to take a subject from the Scriptures, I should content myself with saying that such a prohibition would be too broad. It is not applicable alike to all the Jewish Chronicles, and least of all to a mythic story which is to be referred to times when the religion of the Hebrews was in a rudimentary condition, and when the effects of the effort made by Abraham and Moses to lift the Theistic conceptions of their countrymen on to a higher plane had wellnigh died away. Jahveh or Jehovah was little more to Jephthah and the Gileadites than a tribal God of Battles, such as Milcom and Chemosh were to Moab and Ammon. By the time we come to the days of the Prophets, when God had become the universal Creator, the boundless Being whose attributes, besides omnipotence, were love, mercy, pity, forgiveness and fatherhood, who was at once the touchstone and sanction for all hope, desire, and mental outlook, the whole case is altered; then and onwards the literature of the Jews, bound up with their religion, and hardly less with ours, becomes sacrosanct and not to be touched. I have for the foregoing reasons deemed myself at full liberty to deal as I pleased with the story of Jephthah's daughter. I have preserved the main incidents in all their naked cruelty, but I have not scrupled to weave around them the details of a romantic drama. I have allowed myself absolute freedom in my work, and I trust especially that no traces of archaism are to be found, either

in the diction, or in my treatment of the subject. Nor have I affected to make in the various characters any presentation of the Oriental type. The personages are simply human beings in whom the unquestioning superstition of a God supposed to delight in bloody and human sacrifice is taken for granted as a supreme and overmastering motive. I accept the Hebrew story in good faith, just as I have accepted before now the legends of ancient Greece. Jephthah, an illegitimate scion of the House of Gilead, itself a branch of one of the Half Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, probably of the former, finds his claim to a share in his father's heritage refused by his kindred and by the Elders of his tribe. He has retired to the mountain valleys between the territories of Gilead and Ammon, and, having established himself there as a robber chief, has attained a position of some consequence. His military reputation has induced the Gileadites, who have resolved to claim from Ammon the lands lying between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, to recall him, and place their government in his hands. At this moment the poem opens. After some demur, Jephthah accepts their "Judgeship," and prepares for war. Before starting on the campaign, he makes that vow to Jahveh, the purport of which and its tragic consequences form one of the pathetic inheritances of mankind. He is a widower, and has only one daughter, named Thyrzah, who has just reached a marriageable age. Her he has reared in his hill fastness above Mizpah, and for companion has given her a captive maiden called Zipporah, of a good family among the Ammonites of Rabbah. These two have grown up as sisters, and are tenderly attached. Jephthah, so far as has been compatible with his position as a predatory chieftain, has contrived to keep upon friendly terms with the Ammonites, and so Zipporah from time to time has paid visits to her kindred in her native city. There she has made acquaintance with a young noble named Magdiel, the bosom friend of

Nahash, Crown Prince of Ammon. Magdiel has conceived an unrequited love for Zipporah, who in her turn has nourished for the Crown Prince a passion as hopeless as it was unsuspected either by its object or by those about her. He, on the other hand, has had his imagination powerfully excited by Magdiel's account of the beauty and accomplishments of Thyrzah. The two young men, each secretly in pursuit of his own desires, have wandered together during a summer excursion into the neighbourhood of Mizpah. They have seated themselves to rest in a patch of rocky woodland, and while they are there discussing their several hopes and dreams, and especially while Magdiel is rebuking Nahash on the subject of his infatuation for an alien maid, they are overheard by Thyrzah and Zipporah, who have been gathering wild fruits and flowers in the same wood. Thyrzah thus becomes acquainted with the aspirations of the Prince, and straightway determines, more from womanly curiosity at first than from any other feeling, to accord him that chance of an interview which she has thus learned that he is seeking to obtain. She feels herself impregnable in her own pride of race, but Zipporah is correspondingly timid, and foresees catastrophe to herself as well as danger for Thyrzah; she is, however, unable to hinder her friend's resolve. Two meetings accordingly take place; one, between Magdiel and Zipporah, in which, without betraying herself, Zipporah informs her lover of the impending war between Gilead and Ammon, and the consequent danger to Thyrzah should she allow her thoughts and hopes to centre upon Nahash; the other, between Nahash and Thyrzah, in which the Prince discloses his love, and Thyrzah listens with growing favour to his story. The two last named part under a reciprocal conviction that they have met at once too soon and too late, and must recoil before the barrier, or at all events await the issue, of the war that has broken out between their respective houses. The

campaign proceeds, and, as its results develop, Jephthah becomes more and more dismayed by the dreadful chances attendant upon his vow; but, for all that, he does not waver in his determination not to palter with Jahveh. He encounters Nahash in the final battle, and challenges him to single combat, hoping therein to solve the terrible problem before him either by his own death or capture. But Nahash, obedient to an injunction of Thyrzah that he should not raise his hand against her father, avoids the invitation, and even allows Jephthah to believe that his refusal arises from personal fear. He is subsequently overpowered by a company of Gileadite soldiers, and brought in as a prisoner. Terms of peace are discussed; among them is one, proposed by Nahash in words of almost reverential diffidence, that he should marry Thyrzah, and receive back part of his lost territories with her, as her dower. To this Jephthah is disposed to accede, but states frankly the intervening peril which confronts them all. The arrangement itself provokes the fury of Jair, a Gileadite Lord, who has been a suitor for the hand of Thyrzah, but has by her been somewhat peremptorily rejected. Jair retires to plot vengeance. He unfortunately meets a youth named Ithamar, Jephthah's armour-bearer, and the foster-brother of Thyrzah. Ithamar has discovered the fact and purport of Jephthah's vow, and has determined to go off independently to warn Thyrzah, and either by persuasion or force to prevent her from coming out to meet her father. He innocently imparts his design to Jair, who proceeds to thwart it. Jair starts before Ithamar, lies in wait for him in a mountain pass, and kills him, as he supposes, with an arrow. Meantime Jephthah and Nahash proceed towards Mizpah. As they approach the town, sounds of harps, tabrets, and cymbals are heard, and a choric song, in which the voice of Thyrzah is conspicuous. The dreaded catastrophe of the meeting takes place, and Thyrzah is told of the vow, and accepts her fate. The historic

respite of two months is supposed to have been accorded to her. Whatever efforts Nahash may have made during that interval to undermine her spiritual constancy, he makes none in a final interview which takes place between them on the evening before she is to suffer. He declares that he will die with her, and she accepts his devotion. They part to meet on the fatal morrow. The terrible ceremonial antecedent to sacrifice has been completed, and the Priest is just stepping forward to address the people, when Ithamar rushes in. He denounces Jair, and tells how he has himself been found and tended by some wandering Ammonites, and restored, but too late to save his foster-sister. The proof of Jair's treachery is condign; he even avows his deed, and glories in it. He is ordered for execution, but before he can be seized, he springs back, plucks the dagger from the belt of Nahash (all the Hebrews, as engaged upon a religious rite, being unarmed), and stabs him. He is hurried off the stage, followed by Ithamar, who has picked up the dagger which the murderer has flung down. Nahash dies in Thyrzah's arms. She covers his body with her veil, and after a gentle word or two to Ithamar, who comes back to say that he has dealt justice upon Jair, she turns to the Priest. As the latter moves forward to take her hand, the curtain falls.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

*JEPHTHAH, *Captain and Judge of Gilead.*

*JAIR, *a Gileadite Lord.*

ITHAMAR, *Armourbearer to Jephthah, and Foster-Brother of*
- *Thyrzah.*

An Elder of Gilead.

A Priest of *Jahveh.

NAHASH, *Prince of Ammon.*

MAGDIEL, *an Ammonite Lord.*

An Officer of Jephthah's Guard.

THYRZAH, *Daughter of Jephthah.*

ZIPPORAH, *an Ammonite captive and friend of Thyrzah.*

Three Gileadite Soldiers.

Three Ammonite Soldiers.

Gileadite Youths, Maidens, and Populace.

* The letter "J" as in "Jahveh" to be pronounced like
"Y."

ERRATA.

For "sprang" *read* "sprung", page 150.

For "life—love" *read* "lifelove", page 166.

In the second line of the last stanza upon page 198, *for*

"Alas, alas," *read* "Call up again".

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

AN OPEN SPACE IN THE TOWN OF GILEAD.

Jephthah and the Elders of Gilead seated under a group of trees.

Jephthah.

NOW to this business; ye have brought me
here,

Elders of Gilead, and ye, kinsmen mine,
Out of that pleasant valley which I won
By sword and bow, and where I dwell at peace
With you and Ammon; ye would have me change
My hardwon rest for wilful hazardous war,
And shoulder quarrels that are none of mine,
But yours alone. Why should I do this thing?

An Elder. To help us share the peace thou dost
enjoy.

Thou art a captain of renown; thy birth,

And thine unportioned manhood—for thy sire
Gave thee no heritage among his sons—
Have made thee what thou art, wily and strong;
Thy soul hath grown attuned to war, as pines
Draw forth their music from the mountain storms;
And thou hast culled a sheaf of freebooters
Out of the hills, as hardy as thyself
And thine by discontent and turbulence
Of spirit like thine own; a common fear
Of them and thee hath won that peace thou namest
From Moab and from Ammon and from us.
There standeth none among us like to thee:
We are thy kin; come home to us, and help us.

Jephth. When I was little in your eyes, ye helped
My father's sons to drive me forth, as one
Unworthy of that kinship ye now claim.
They said, forsooth, I was a harlot's child
Not fit for heritage; they lied, and ye
Echoed the lie; now ye would make of me
Your tool, your ploughshare wherewithal to break
A stubborn furrow, and that done, a thing
Left out to rust upon the wayside. No:
It likes me not. Fight your own Ammonites.
I take mine honest and impartial toll

Of all the travellers who come my way,
Be they the sons of Abraham or Lot,
Jacob or Esau.

Elder. Is it then thy boast
To live by plunder?

Jephth. No, good friend, my fate;
The fate whereto my kindred set their seal;
Ill-usage makes the robber; he but pays
His makers for his making, and they take
Their wages from the one mint to his hand.
Had ye but bidden these my brethren share
Their father's heritage with me their brother—
A dole of justice that had cost you nothing—
I had stayed peaceable and poor, grown up
A hedgerow sapling with you all; as 'tis,
Ye have transmuted me to metal, brazed
In your own furnace, welded, hardened, wrought,
By hammers ye set going, now, of fibre
Too tough for you to fashion, and—once more—
Too rare to do your tillage with. Farewell;
I know I am a costly terror; yet
I bear nor hate nor malice, though I laugh—
And, look you, these same monies, which you pay
To buy the safety of your hill-pastures,

Have been withheld, unwittingly, I doubt not;
Weigh out the shekels, of your courtesy;
Young Ithamar shall give you quittance due.

[*Going.*

Elder. Nay, stay; we do repent; seems it so mean
To say, we wronged thee once, and would avenge
Thee on ourselves—if that thou deem'st it vengeance
To own thy worth, and take thee for our ruler?

Jephth. Till I have slaughtered Ammon! But
what then?

Elder. Jahveh shall be our witness; lead us
forth—

We'll do our best to quit ourselves like men—
And should he favour us, and thou return
In peace to Mizpah, thou shalt be our judge,
Obeyed as Gideon, Othniel, Deborah,
Nay, Joshua himself.

Jephth. [*After a pause.*] Will ye swear this?

Elder. In all good faith.

Jephth. In face of Jahveh's altar?
And for all Gilead no less than yourselves?

Elder. E'en now: th' occasion presses, and delay
Might cool thy will.

Jephth. Lead on, then; I will follow. [*Exeunt.*

ACT I.

SCENE II.

ON AN EMINENCE OUTSIDE THE TOWN OF GILEAD.

*Before a rude altar of turf. The Elders and
People of Gilead assembled; Jephthah and
followers.*

A burnt offering still smoking upon the altar.

Jephthah.

WELL, ye have sworn, and Jahveh hath borne
witness;

And so, I swear. Hear me, Almighty One,
Thou who hast led the Hebrews into battle,
Whene'er they served and trusted thee aright;
If I have never lifted hand in prayer
To Milcom or to Chemosh, but have kept
My heart for thee, befriend me in this chance!
And, if thou fail me not, but wilt bestow
The hosts of Ammon into these my hands,
I vow a vow to thee, that whatsoe'er,

When I return victorious, shall be first
To cross the threshold of my house to meet me,
However precious, I will make it thine,
And it shall bleed in face of this thine altar.
And so do thou to me, and more besides,
If I prove false to this my vow.

[*Music and song heard approaching.*]

What 's that?

Elder. The maids and youths of Gilead, at their
head

Thy daughter, Thyrzah, come to grace our pact
With song and dance.

Jephth. [*Aside.*] My daughter at their head!
'Tis well I have not fought; my little Thyrzah,
Only to think how it had been with thee
If I had fought, and thou hadst come with song
To greet me thus on my return!

Elder. How now?

What aileth thee? Thy brows grow dark; thine air
Is as of one who broods over a doubt.

Dost thou repent?

Jephth. Nay, nay.

[*Aside.*] Oh, the mere thought!
It is as though the sun had dropped from heaven!

Enter the singers, playing harps and beating tabrets.

Thyrzah, at their head, clashing her cymbals.

Chorus.

Tabret and harp for Jahveh the Mighty!

Song and cymbal his praises tell;

Hear ye a lay of his servant Moses

Working wonders for Israel!

Thyrzah. [Clashes her cymbals and sings.]

Lord Moses walked in the King's chambers,

Pharaoh the King was he fain to see;

When to him spake a chamberlain,

"Wouldst thou, perchance, have speech of me?"

"Nay, not to thee, nor such as thee,

The message that I come to bring;

'Tis mine to do before thy master

The bidding of a mightier King."

"And who is he, thy mightier one,

Whose servant goeth with head so high?"

"He dwelleth in the Heaven of Heavens,

And sitteth, throned, upon Sinai."

Loud laughed King Pharaoh's chamberlain,

“Well, thou shalt in, and tell thy tale;

But I would not dare the doom thou darest

For half the wealth of the Nile's vale.”

[*Clashes her cymbals.*]

Chor. [*With harp, tabret, and cymbals.*]

Tabret and harp for Jahveh the Mighty!

Ah, but he loveth his people well;

Hear ye the lay of the many marvels

Wrought upon Egypt for Israel!

Thyrzah. [*Clashing her cymbals.*]

Through twelve fair rooms of the King's palace

They two passed onward, one by one,

Until they stayed in the last and fairest,

Where Pharaoh sat on a golden throne.

“And who is this,” cried Pharaoh the King,

“Thou bringest here unbidden of me?”

Full lowly bowed the chamberlain,

“Sir King, himself shall answer thee.

“For he saith he serveth one more mighty

Than thou on this thy seat so high,

One who dwelleth above the Heavens,
And sitteth throned upon Sinai."

"Say what thou hast," said Pharaoh the King,
"But see thou sayest it warily;
And anger me not," quoth the King Pharaoh,
"For an thou dost, thou shalt surely die."

[Clashes her cymbals.

Chor. [With harps, etc.]

Tabret and harp for Jahveh the Mighty!
Praise him, praise him, he loves us well;
Hear ye the lay of the lesson of Egypt,
Taught for his chosen of Israel!

Thyrs. [Clashing her cymbals.]

Then boldly spake our good Lord Moses,
"I am not careful to answer thee,
For the God I serve, but whom ye know not,
Will do his pleasure concerning me.

"He bade me say unto thee, O King,
' Mine eyes have looked on my people's tears,
Out of the burden of their great bondage,
The sound of their crying hath reached mine
ears.

“ ‘Tis time that thou shouldst let them go
From underneath thy heavy hand,
With flocks and herds and wives and children,
To worship me in their fathers' land.’ ”

Loud laughed the Lords of the Court of Pharaoh,
Loud laughed the King on his golden throne;
And all made mock of our good Lord Moses,
With “ Begone, thou Hebrew slave, begone.”

[Clashes her cymbals.]

Chor. [With harps, etc.]

Tabret and harp for Jahveh the Mighty!
Shawm and trumpet his praises swell;
Hear ye the lay of the plagues of Egypt,
Sent for the love of his Israel!

Thyrz. [Clashing her cymbals.]

His rod he raised, and blood for water
Filled all their rivers up to the brim,
And men and herds went dry with loathing;
But still they mocked and derided him.

[Cymbals.]

His rod he raised, and frogs in thousands
Crawled everywhere in the filth and mire,

And flies, and lice, and locusts wasted
Field, and palace, and farm, and byre.

[*Cymbals.*

His rod he raised, and blains and murrain
Fell anon upon beasts and men,
And hail he brought, and a triple darkness;
Few, I ween, were the mockers then!

[*Cymbals.*

His rod he raised, and thrice again,
At morn, at noon, and at eventide,
And every first-born child of a woman
In all the borders of Egypt, died.

[*Cymbals.*

Chor. [*As before.*]

Tabret and harp for Jahveh the Mighty!
God of Gods, he doth all excel;
Hear ye the lay of our mighty leader,
Leading the armies of Israel!

Thyrs. [*Clashing her cymbals.*]

Forth we went with their spoils upon us,
Jahveh guided our outward way,
Guided and guarded in light and darkness,
Fire by night, and a cloud by day.

Brought us whither the winds, his servants,
Held the floods upon either hand.
Held them parted till we passed over,
Dryshod, as upon dry land.

After us ever the hosts of Pharaoh,
Horsemen, footmen, chariots, sped,
Between the toppling walls of water,
Down to the deeps of the ocean's bed.

Spake our God to the winds, his servants,
Bade them suffer the floods to flow,
Then full soon did the hosts of Pharaoh
Perish in one wide overthrow.

Waves went rocking and breakers rolling,
All was as it was wont to be;
But every mocker of our Lord Moses,
Drank of the salt of the Red Sea.

[*Cymbals.*

Chor. [With harps, etc.]

Tabret and harp for Jahveh the Mighty!
Song, shawm, trumpet, and cymbal, swell;

Jephthah's Daughter.

21

This is the lay of the doom of Pharaoh,
Wrought for the Fathers of Israel!

[Final crash of instruments.]

Elder. Thus is our solemn compact sealed, and
graced

With sacrifice, and sacred dance and song.

Hearken to me, oh ye of Gilead,

Old men and youths, mothers and maidens, all!

Henceforth we put away the worship strange

Of Milcom, Chemosh, Baal, Ashtaroht,

With all abominations such as moved

Our Jahveh in times past, and now hath stirred

His wrath to vex us with these Ammonites

From Jabbok unto Arnon; we are sworn

To pay our homage unto him alone,

Obedient to the ancient manner shown

By him and by his servant Moses. More;

We have all sworn that Jephthah is henceforth

Captain, and judge, and ruler over us.

This ye all know, and are content?

All.

Content!

Elder. Then get you gone; and each man arm
himself

With sword and spear, and due provision make

For march and battle; and may he who rolled
Before our fathers' eyes the hosts of Pharaoh,
Like pebbles, 'neath the rush of the Red Sea,
Give Ammon to the slaughter! And for thee,
Our kinsman reconciled, and trusty leader,
We leave thee to thy counsels; we are thine
To follow and obey; we wait thy call.

[*Exeunt all but Jephthah.*]

Jephth. [*Solus.*] Terror hath seized me; not the
fear of fight,

Or dread of rule; with both am I well pleased;
And, filled with joy and pride in this day's work,
I could set out exultant, and could smite
These Ammonites from river unto river,
But for this vow: I spake it with my hand
Laid on his altar; I am sworn to him
To war, and pay the cost of victory,
Whate'er it be; and victory I shall have;
I feel his will within me work a might
That shall not fail; so that mine oath stands forth
A term inevitable, as is night
Waiting on day: I dare not swerve, nor palter,
Nor play at shifts with him. I dare not speak,
'To bid her that she come not forth to greet me,

As she came now. What if I saw her then,
As in this hour, with cymbal and with song
Heading her maidens! Yet a hint, a breath,
Would bring down devastation on us all,
Gilead and her, not me alone. My girl,
The choicest jewel of our tribe; my star,
My moon of Mizpah; my chief joy in exile;
Mine only solace since her mother died;
My little Thyrzah!

Thyrz. [*Re-entering.*] See! Thy little Thyrzah!
Did father call for her because he loved her?

Jephth. [*Embracing her.*] Love thee! I cannot
bear to leave thee, sweet,
E'en for this lordship over Gilead;
Love thee! Oh, tell me to forego these wars,
And we will back to Mizpah, even now,
Ere this first morning that hath hatched our greatness,
Hath brooded it till noon; and leave them all,
Gilead and Ammon, to make war alone;
While we stay in our valley, thou and I;
Where I will hold thee safe against the world;
Alone, if so thou wilt, or thou shalt wed
Some worthy man of thine own choosing, sweet;
I care not whom—Hebrew or Ammonite,

From Moab or from Edom—

Thyrz.

Oh, my father!

Wouldst let me bring thee home an alien love?

Jephth. Ay, wheresoe'er begotten; so thou love
him,

Then will I love him; Lot and Abraham
Came of one stock, and Moab, Ammon, Edom,
And we of Jacob's race, are we not sprung
From one or th' other? Little we two owe
To those who drave us forth. So choose for me;
Peace and thy love, or war with all its chance?

Thyrz. How canst thou doubt? I know thou
dost not doubt;

Thy vow is made.

Jephth. What vow? Thou heardest none!

Thyrz. Nay, but I know it all unheard.

Jephth. [*Aside.*] Is 't so?

Then am I safe perchance.

Thyrz.

Why break thy vow?

Jephth. [*Aside.*] She knows it, and will spare her-
self and me.

Thyrz. Think'st thou that I would let thy love
or mine

Outcry the call that lifts thee to this hazard?

A daughter of the seed of Israel,

ACT I.

SCENE III.

A ROCKY WOODLAND NEAR THE TOWN OF MIZPAH.

Enter Nahash and Magdiel.

Thyrzah and Zipporah are seen for a moment at the back of the stage. They have baskets in their hands containing flowers and fruit.

Magdiel.

AND so thou lovest, Prince, this stranger maid,
This daughter of the Hebrew freebooter;
Albeit thou hast ne'er had speech of her,
Nor even looked on her!

Nahash. True, oh my friend;
I have not seen her yet; but time for that!
For beauty is a lesson lightly conned,
A glance, and we have got its page by heart,
And there it stays. But I have heard from thee,
Enough for love's incitement, of her grace,

Her goodness, and her innocence; her gifts
Of delicate handicraft; how she can weave
Songs that her fellow damsels, and the youths
Of Gilead, love to chaunt at festivals
To harp and tabret; as thou know'st, her sire
Was driven out to these valleys by his kin,
And in his exile has as often warred
For us as with us.

Magd. Ay, but ever keeps
Apart in time of peace. As I have told thee,
She is his only child, and held by him
'Too precious for communion; she herself
Casts pride of race into his jealous scale,
And lives secluded.

Nah. But how comes it then
'That thou shouldst know her beauty and her worth,
Yet neither fire thee?

Magd. Ah, my fires have fed
On other fuel! For sole company
She hath that daughter of our race, whom he
Made captive and hath reared along with her
But would long since have freed, had not the souls
Of these two maids by their long solitude
Been knit with so much virgin tenderness

That they are closer sisters than by blood.

Nah. How know'st thou this?

Magd. How know it? Well, my Prince,
I'll wed a trust to thine; this Zipporah
Comes down at whiles to sojourn with her kin—
On whom the light captivity she loves
Has ceased to throw the shadow of a shame—
And I have seen and loved her.

Nah. Ah! And she?

Magd. Protests the gentle Thyrzah hath oft vowed
To die, ere she would wed out of her kin.
With her, I hold it well to match with kind;
And so dost thou; thou warrest with thyself
Through all thy dreaming; I have heard thee sing
Songs stuffed with strange and bootless images
Of yearnings against nature, pine for palm,
And mountain briar for the lowland rose,
And other wild phantastic garniture
Wherein you singers would make folly fine:
Such talk is tell-tale of self-blame, my lord.
Cannot a prince of Ammon find a mate
Among his country's daughters?

Nah. Grandam yet
Never gave wiser counsel; fair enough

Is every maid of Ammon; Thyrzah proud;
And all my dreams are vain; yet still I dream,
And love to sing the songs thou deem'st so wild.

*[Thyrzah and Zipporah again momentarily
show themselves to the audience, but
again conceal themselves.]*

Nahash sings.

The west wind wooeth the mountain pine,
And wingeth her way to him over the sea,
He heareth her whisper, and feeleth her twine,
And daintily whispereth, twineth she;
But he bends down to the valley.

For making a crown in the haze he spies
A fair young palm of the golden plain,
And he and the sea-wind mingle their sighs,
But vain are the murmurs of each of the twain;
The palm hears nought in the valley.

The ivy loveth the eglantine,
And stealeth her way with a crafty grace,
But she vouchsafeth him never a sign,
As she leaneth over the gray rock-face;
And she too yearns for the valley.

For down in a garden she marketh a rose,
And up from its heart, while the soft wind stirs,
The breath of a careless perfume blows;
It blendeth its sweets with her own, but hers
Ne'er reach to the rose in the valley.

Alas for the spirits that strange loves fire,
The pine, and the wind, and the ivy spray,
➤ And sad little heart of the simple briar;
Each flingeth its treasure of pain away;
No answer comes from the valley.

For the valley is far and fair and proud
And spurneth us of the mountain side,
With our winter of snow and summer of cloud;
So one more sigh for her beauty and pride,
And then farewell to the valley.

Magd. These are but flowers of thy self-deceit;
Light forgeries wherewith thy mind would strive
To cloak its own beguilement; tricky feats
Of song, sung idly for the sake of singing;
They are but pretty fooling, and no plea:
Were all the pines in love with all the palms,

And every sea-wind sighing for some pine,
Prince Nahash still were wayward, and his quest
Perverse.

Nah. As thou wilt have it! Tell me, though,
Good sage, upon what errand wast thou bent
When thou didst lure me hitherward to-day?
I know thee; thou didst think, after some shift
That rid thee of me, to explore yon path
That leads down to the Hebrew's hold. Well, come,
I'm for thee! Thou shalt see thy Zipporah;
And thou and she together shall win speech
For me of this proud Thyrzah—if 'tis true
That she be proud, for in her Hebrew tongue
Her name doth stand for gentle comeliness—
But proud or gentle, whatsoe'er her shows
Of humour on the hearing, she shall hear
All that is in my heart, nay e'en perchance
This very song that thou deridest. Come!

[*Exeunt.*

Enter Thyrzah and Zipporah.

Thyrz. Nay! She has heard! Who told him I was
proud?

And is it true? Am I proud, Zipporah?

I cannot set at naught my birth; I am

A daughter of the house of Israel,
Our Jahveh's chosen people, for whose sake
He overwhelmed the Pharoah, and laid low
The necks of seven nations, making room
To plant us in. Proud, said he? Well, I am;
Yet would not he so deemed me. Zipporah,
Speak, child! Art thou gone mute?

Zipp.

Oh Thyrsah mine,

I would we had not listened! I misdoubt
The issue of this chance: let us haste home,
Close door and casement; let them get themselves,
Without or sight, or speech, or good of us,
Back unto Rabbah!

Thyrs.

Then my Zipporah

Would miss her meeting with her Magdiel. No!
Sweet sister mine, we will not thwart thy friend.
As for the other Ammonite—a prince,
Saidst thou? My father's daughter need not shirk
Encounter with ten princes, while she keeps
That pride wherewith they dower her. Besides,
If he be worthy of the name of prince,
He'll take more foiling than the sullen fence
Of bolts and bars can give; repulsed to-day,
He would force Time to open his shut fist,

And thereout shake an hour to tell his tale in.
Away, then, Zipporah! We'll dare the chance!
If lonely Jael in her Kenite's tent
Could deal with Sisera, a foe and armed,
Shall we lack all we need to hold our own,
And cope with these two stingless visitants?
Bethink thee; we surprised them in their talk;
It was all honest.

Zipp. Honest, yes; and yet——

Thyrz. What yet?

Zipp. I scarce know how to answer thee;
My Thyrzah, there are moments in our lives
That stir and start us, but disquiet not,
Finding and leaving calm; as breezes spring,
Whereof we feel that they will breathe and pass,
And work no mischief in the summer woods;
While others in their earliest sigh betray
The sough of coming tempest ere it come;
Such as these last are moments that rise charged
With thrills of nameless portent, menacing
Like those mute unfamiliar forms that point
Lean hands to fright us in our dreams; I feel
That this is of their kind.

Thyrz. What fearest thou?

Zipp. Nought for myself, nor ought I know for thee.

Thyrz. And yet thou lookest as a heifer, child,
Might look, who saw the sacrificial knife,
And seeing, knew it. Courage, little fool;
There is no knife.

Zipp. Ah, so thought Balaam;
No angel stood before him in the path,
And yet the ass was right.

Thyrz. Well, so he was;
But I'm still stubborn. Howsoe'er it end,
'Tis I shall be the victim! Come then, bind
A chaplet on my brows for sacrifice,
And lead me to the altar. Let's begone. [*Exeunt.*

ACT I.

SCENE IV.

A SPOT OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE OF MIZPAH.

TIME, EVENING.

Zipporah and Magdiel.

Zipporah. [Alone.]

OH barbed with truth was that quick shaft of
fear

Which struck into my heart when we two first

Surprised them in their brotherly debate.

I knew them; 'twas with sense of coming ill,

No girlish dread, that, had she not constrained me,

I would have fled at once; long ere we heard

Those fatal words, "And so thou lovest, Prince,

This daughter of the Hebrew freebooter?"

'Twas over then; she rushed on fresh disclosure,

With all the rashness of her haughty soul,

As on a peril. Oh, the chance, the chance!

Ten times more fatal than our own worst fault,
And far more ruthless than our deadliest foe,
Is chance! We two start to pick bramble-berries,
This morning of all others, and they two
Choose this one, out of all in the wide year,
To wander hitherward, and hold their talk,
Which we must needs encounter and o'erhear.
Hence stand I here to meet a man I love not,
And leave my friend the while to pin her heart
On his for whom mine hungers—She no less
As innocent of all deceit to me,
As I will strive to be of hate to her
When she hath grown to love him, as she will,
As surely as he too will dote on her.

Enter Magdiel.

But here comes Magdiel.

Magd. Oh Zipporah,
Doth this sweet challenge to a meeting hint
That love upheaves the surface of thy heart,
As lilies lift the meadow turf in spring?
Or, say we, that its mellow glories cast
A richness on the border of thy soul,
As yonder rising moon e'en now doth spread

Her first shy beams over the roofs of Mizpah?

Zipp. Magdiel, nay; misthink me not! I sent
To warn thee and the Prince, thy friend; to-day
Thyrzah and I were gathering wood-berries,
And, as we plucked, we overheard you both;
Thee chiding him for dreams of her, and him
Singing wild songs of strange and wayward loves;
Graceful, ah well, so call we things of nought,
When they have nought beneath them; but not
these;

Rank blossoms these of poisonous phantasy.

Oh, Magdiel, there is peril for us all;

The Gileadites are arming against Ammon,

With Jephthah for their captain.

Magd. Jephthah! War!

'Tis for the Jordan Valley!

Zipp. More than that;

Lord Jair hath asked Thyrzah of her sire;

And Jephthah leans to him, nor is he one

Whom fathers care to thwart—

Magd. Well, in the names

Of Milcom, Chemosh, and Jahveh, all three,

May the man wed with her!

Zipp. Jair is rich,

Brave, comely, and he cometh of a house
Of good repute in Gilead; fierce of will
Is he, and as a leopard in his craft.
I dread his wrath and guile should Thyrzah turn
From him to our Prince Nahash :

Magd. Told like this,

Thy news is of the sort that e'en avails
To harry Love from his own citadel,
And hold the place awhile. Nahash e'en now
Is striving to gain speech of Thyrzah.

Zipp. Yes;

I know that too, and therefore 'twas I sent
To bid thee meet me; for I cannot love thee
As thou wouldst have me love thee, Magdiel.

Magd. Then woe to me!

Zipp. Nor less to me.

Magd. To thee!

Thou wilt not tell me thou hast flung thy heart
To some wild outlaw of the Hebrew's band?

Zipp. No; Zipporah the Ammonite will wed
With none out of her people. Trust to that.

Magd. And that is much; to whom, if not to me,
Of all the sons of Ammon, could I fear
That gentle Zipporah would stoop her head;

Jephthah's Daughter. 39

Unless it were my Nahash; he with song
And valorous grace might draw forth every heart
From Jabbok unto Arnon; but, farewell:

His name recalls me. I must take thy news
With all the speed I may; farewell, again;
I will not cease to hope; once more, farewell.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT I.

SCENE V.

THE OUTSIDE OF JEPHTHAH'S HOUSE.

*Nahash below, Thyrzah at an open casement.**Nahash.*

CHILD of a race mine holds for enemy,
And none the less for being kin—for oft,
As our long years of war have taught us all,
Kinship is but a whetstone to make keen
The tip of quarrel's spear—beautiful maid,
Whom I should loathe, but needs must love, forgive
A son of Ammon who hath ventured here,
Unarmed, amid the sheepcotes of thy sire,
To tell thee that he loves thee, and then go.

Thyrz. Then, sir, farewell; and—'twere but
courtesy

To thank thee for thy pains in coming here.

Nah. Am I dismissed so briefly? Can the sun
Repent him of his rising, and sink back
Behind the eastern hills?

Thyrz. Ay, if the sun
Go back of his own choice. Thou saidst thyself,
Thou camest but to tell me of thy love,
And then to go; and so I said farewell,
To speed thy pleasure; were it maidenly
To jest with thee, might I not say that thou
Art as thy sun would be, did he but rise
To tell men that he came to show himself,
And straightway set again.

Nah. Nay, thou dost twist
Words that but meant submission to thy will.

Thyrz. I take the words as were the words; thy
tale
Was short, and plain, and honest; as it was,
So should the grace of thy departure be;
I would not stay thee; thou didst ask no answer,
Nor, had thou asked one, have I aught to give.
And so, fair sun, whose day hath been so brief,
Briefer than dawn itself, once more, farewell.

Nah. Thou art not wroth with me?

Thyrz. Had I been wroth,

'Thou hadst been dead; I had come down to thee,
And slain thee where thou standest. Jephthah's
daughter

Hath but one remedy for wrong, and that
She weareth at her girdle! Harken, Prince;
For Prince thou art; young Zipporah and I
O'erheard you in the wood. Nay, start not, sir;
We were no purposed eavesdroppers; 'twas chance;
Ye came within earshot of us, the while
We gathered berries. Zipporah had fled,
But I o'ermastered her; we stayed and listened.

Nah. And I still live and so may hope?

Thyrs.

Fair Prince,

I heard both thee and Magdiel call me proud:
Perchance I am, as all should be, whose veins
Are ruddy with the sacred stream that flows
From Abraham, our Jahveh's chosen friend.
Ye folks of Moab, Ammon, Edom, Seir,
Spring from less honoured scions of the stock
Whence our sire sprang. How can we help ourselves,
If we be proud?

Nah.

And yet we are of kin;

Why stand aloof? Listen to me, sweet maid;
To win the right to love and cherish thee,

I will swear now to be thy father's friend
In peace and war, for life or death; my home
Shall rest in thine election; from this day
I am no Ammonite, but a plain son
Of Lot, the son of Haran, son of Terah,
Thine Abraham's sire; I claim to say to thee,
Thy people are my people, and I vow
To make thy God my God. I love thee, maid,
As our earth loves the sun, the royal orb
Who gives her light and warmth, as thou hast given
New light and warmth to me; thou couldst not
speak

The word that shall be death to my resolve;
It lives while I live; if it anger thee,
There is one only way to rid thee of it,
Come forth and slay me!

Thyrz. [*Throwing down her dagger to him.*] Take
this dagger, Prince;

'Tis the best pledge that Thyrzah can bestow
For token that thou hast not angered her.
But yet, thou must not swear. Thou knowest not
That war hath wakened up in Gilead
Upon thy tribe, and that his countrymen
Have chosen Jephthah's self to lead them forth

Against thy father's house; and thou, fair lord,
Must war upon my sire, as he on thine :
I can but hold thee as his foe; nay, more;
When he was wavering, after he had sworn
To be the crown and champion of this quarrel,
'Twas I who held him to his vow. Alas!
I knew thee not, and knew not what I did;
What know I even now, save this alone,
That all my pride falls from me! Oh, farewell!
There is no hope; we are too late; too late,
Albeit but by a day. Thou and my sire
Must meet as foemen.

Nah.

Thyrzah, hark to me!

If this be true, we are indeed too late,
To plight our troth yet for a little while;
But wars will end, and if I live, I'll make
One term of peace 'twixt Gilead and Ammon,
That we two wed.

Thyrz.

There is no hope, fair Prince;

A chill falls on me, like cold autumn dews
That make the grasses shudder. Go, farewell.
I will not have thee stay; 'twere perilous—
My tide hath fallen to so low an ebb,
I dare not see thee face a peril—Go!

Nay, yet one little word; take up yon knife,
And wear it in thy belt through all this war;
But use it not, save of necessity;
And whatsoe'er the chance of fight may be,
Raise not thy hand against my sire. And, Prince;
Think of proud Thyrzah, that thou heard'st her say,
The lowland palm hath seen the mountain pine,
And sighed him back his sigh from out her valley.
Farewell, farewell.

[*She closes the casement.*

Nah.

Nay, one more glance!

Thyrz. [*Reopening the casement.*] Farewell.

(*Scene closes.*)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

IN JEPHTHAH'S HOUSE.

*Thyrzah and Jephthah.**Thyrzah. [Alone.]*

OH this is love indeed! it doth amaze me
To think how soon I have been overwhelmed;
No mountain river ever rose so fast
After one downpour. Zipporah was right;
That moment in the wood was one of portent,
And I the fool who braved it. Where is now
The rash, audacious girl who deemed her heart
Mailed for encounter with ten princes? One
Came tripping 'neath my window, and forthwith
My pride fell like the walls of Jericho;
With no more battering! Oh the shame, the shame,
Vexation, and confusion, and rebuke!
Thus to be laid bare at the first assault!

“Child of a race mine holds for enemy”—
So he began; and ere the words were out,
I held his so no more—“Beautiful maid,
Whom I should loathe, but needs must love”—

Fair sir,

‘That one touch painted both of us—“Forgive
A son of Ammon”—Oh my halfway heart,
Before his crime was told it was forgiven—
“A son of Ammon who hath ventured here
Unarmed among the sheepecotes of thy sire
To tell thee that he loves thee, and then go”—
Nay, this is past all bearing; I recall
His very words, as though they had been scored
Into my heart, like patterns on a plank,
With a hot bodkin. And on all this comes
My father with his tale of Jair’s love,
And I am bound to answer him. No, no;
Nahash or none; so far I know myself.
And as for Jair, I would bathe in slime
Ere I would take him.

Enter Jephthah.

Ah, here is my father:

Father, I’ll have no Jairs; tell him so.

These are no times for wedlock; Jephthah's child
Goes forth in heart to war; her spirit dwells
From this day forward in her father's camp; ,
Tuned to the blare of trumpets, clash of spears,
And rattle of the arrows in the quiver,
And shouts of arming men; it hath no place
For softer questionings till he comes home.
[*Aside.*] That 's my first lie to him, and love's first
fruit!

Jephth. Peace, little gabbler! thou shalt not be pressed.

Let that content thee; but for Jair, child,
He is of mark in Gilead; should I fall,
As fall I may, I know of no man's arm
More able to protect thee. May I tell him
That after battle won—

Thyrz. There liveth none
Who hath so little chance with me; say that.
And, oh my father, talk not of thy death;
Thou wilt not die; but if thou died'st, and I
Were put in peril, what's my dagger for?
Ah me, my dagger—I remind myself—
I dropt it gathering berries in the wood;
Give me another.

[*Aside.*] That's my second lie;

'Two in a minute.

Jephth. [*Giving her his own.*] There, my child,
take this;

Young Nahash, of the royal house of Ammon,
Gave it to me at the last truce.

Thyrz. Young Nahash?
Of Ammon's royal house, said'st thou? And thou,
Didst thou swear friendship to him? No?

Jephth. We swore
To be good friends until we fought again.

Thyrz. What is he like? [*Aside.*] Is that a third?

Jephth. What like?
I think I must not tell thee, little girl,
Or I shall have thee giving me in good sooth
An Ammonite for son-in-law.

Thyrz. Nay, speak;
Have I not often told thee I shall wed
Among my kin alone?

Jephth. Well, fairly then;
Were he of us, I do not know the man
On whom I would as lief bestow my girl;
Young, brave, and true, and beautiful to boot;
And such a harper!

Thyrz. Bring him home in chains,
I do beseech thee, father; and I swear
To knock them off and wed him!

Jephth. Little rogue,
I ought to beat thee! Here's a kiss instead;
[*Kissing her.*

And here's another.

Thyrz. Father, hear one word:
Trust not too much to Jair; he is fierce,
Subtle, and—so a hundred voices say—
As false as a tame panther.

Jephth. Hah! They say—
Who says it?

Thyrz. Half thy band; the other half
Take gifts of him.

Jephth. I do remember me,
That priest of Gilead too bade me beware,
With gravest mien, of one I trusted.

Enter a soldier.

Sold. Lord,
A messenger hath come to summon thee
To council at the camp.

Jephth. So then, farewell,

51

51

With their Prince

51

Thou saucy wretch,

51

51

51

51

ACT II.

SCENE II.

THE CAMP OF THE GILEADITES. OUTSIDE THE
TENT OF JEPHTHAH.

Jephthah and Jair seated. Time, Night.

Jair.

AND now, mine honoured lord, I fain would
ask

What saith the Lady Thyrzah to my suit?
Thou knowest my fortunes; three and twenty towns
Throughout the land of Gilead own me lord.
Hezron, my grandsire, who achieved them all—
What need to tell thee?—wedded in his age
Thy father's sister; so we are akin.

Jephth. Ay, and to make the matter closer still,
After thy grandsire's death, my father took
Abiah, his chief widow, for a wife.
But let that be, albeit 'tis well: know thou,
Thrice three and twenty cities shall not buy

My little Thyrzah, till her own sweet will
Avows the purchase. Jair, list to me;
My daughter's heart were harder won than mine;
It goes but where her trust goes; and for that,
Mine goes the lightlier; understand me, friend;
'Twere idle that we two should talk of wedlock,
And I were false to bid thee hope. But, Jair,
If we be just appraisers of our goods,
The honest faith that merits woman's trust
Is a most rich and honourable dower,
Worth ten times all thy towns; 'tis our own star,
To light our being from within, and make
Our lives all lustrous, e'en though Love should turn,
As yon belated moon in heaven turns hers,
His waning shoulders from us.

Enter a soldier.

What's thy news?

Soldier. Not any, lord, the camp is very still,
And all things orderly.

Jephth. Go with him, Jair,
And make the rounds. And, Jair, whate'er comes,
Be true, as I to thee. Good night to both!

[Exeunt Jair and soldier.]

[*Alone.*] “The camp is still, and all things orderly”:
It saddens me who never yet had rest,
To hear them talk of stillness; none the less
I dare be sworn that all these thousands lie—
Save for some scores of drowsy sentinels—
Snoring like oxen in a summer mead,
Secure because I watch; e’en as my kine
Have grown into a sleek and sleepy breed,
Under the guard of herdsmen and their dogs,
And dream not of the wolf. But, save for these,
Man’s common sort, who do depend on us,
As their own flocks and herds depend on them,
It seems to me that in this visible world
There is no stillness; yonder moon moves on,
And light clouds cross her, fleeter e’en than she;
The constellations change their place in heaven,
With statelier march than earthly monarchs know;
The murmur of the distant cataract,
That reacheth hither faint and faltering,
Helped like a cripple on the night-wind’s arm,
I know is as the roar of herded lions
To him who standeth by its banks; for me,
E’en when I am alone, where no sound is,
That comes within the compass of mine ear,

I feel the universal silence quiver,
As if the Earth, the cradle of all things,
Though her whole progeny should sleep, at touch
Of some unresting foot, went rocking still.
And such are we who rule; our hours of peace
Are but a recollection and a prelude
Of gone and coming storm; spent memories
Of fears that have been blend with timely qualms
Of those that shall be; when we sleep we dream,
And like the anxious hare who dreads the pounce
Of some night-prowling lynx, and in her form
Still pricks her ears, and bares her backward eyes,
We lay us down, and plot, and plan, and make
Of bed and pillow a lone council chamber,
And our own wakeful souls its councillors.
But though this be so, still, we fight to-morrow,
The moon is in the west, and I must sleep.

[Goes into the tent.]

ACT II.

SCENE III.

THE BATTLE OF AROER.

*Jephthah and Ithamar.**Jephthah.*

THESE Ammonites fought well; nor do I think
Young Nahash planned their battle with less
skill;

And they outnumbered us; yet they are beaten.
It was decreed; Jahveh hath willed it so;
And with the victory, once more that dread,
Which the long labours of this war had banished,
Returns upon me. Oh, young Ithamar,
Beyond all follies that thy boyish blood
May prompt thee to—wine, quarrel, love, all else—
Beware of a rash oath.

Itham.

What oath, my lord,
Spoken by thee provokes thee to this warning?

Jephth. That which I swore upon the altar sods;
That whatsoever first should welcome me
Triumphing on the threshold of my home,
Howe'er 'twere precious in mine eyes, should die,
A bloody offering for victory.

Itham. What then? What gift would pious Jeph-
thah grudge
Unto the God of Battles?

Jephth. Oh, thou fool,
Thy foster-sister!

Itham. What! My foster-sister!
By Heaven, I am a miserable wretch;
I saw it not. Is there no stay of this?

Jephth. None, none! I may not palter with
Jahveh—
Nor, were I ready for the coward breach,
Would Thyrzah suffer it.

Enter Nahash with companions.

Who cometh here?
Young Nahash! Oh thou light of Ammon, come;
Lay on, my princely foeman! Though thy cause
Be lost this day, revenge should still be sweet,
And I, methinks, were worthy food for it.

Lay on, and take it; I will ply thee hard,
For honour's sake; but know, thou noble youth,
Seek high or low, thou couldst not find a man
In all the hosts of Israel, nay, not one,
Who underneath thy spear would gladlier bleed.

Nah. Not so, great lord; I will not fight with thee.
Dost thou claim double triumph over me,
To beat me in the field and slay me too?

Jephth. Dost fear?

Nah. Believe it; there's one only man
I fear to fight, and thou art he.

Jephth. That's strange;
I thought thee brave.

Nah. I am; there breatheth none,
Save thou, should fling that doubt at me, and live.

Jephth. Then take me for thy prisoner, gentle
Prince;
See, ye are four, and I have him alone;

[*Pointing to Ithamar.*

I yield me to thy grace.

Nah. My Ammonites
Would show thee none, if I should carry thee
In bonds to Rabbah. Fare thee well; we go
To wreak our spite on fortune, and to take

Some vengeance yet for failure, ere we fly.

[*Exeunt Nahash and companions.*

Itham. Why wouldst thou yield thyself, great
lord?

Jephth. Peace, child!

[*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

SCENE IV.

ANOTHER PART OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

*Enter Hebrew Soldiers with Prince Nahash bound.**First Soldier.*

WHERE shall we find our captain?
Second Soldier.

Here it was

He ordered that his camp be set; for sure

He will be here anon.

Third Soldier. Lo, here he comes.

Enter Jephthah with followers.

Jephth. Ha! What is this? Nahash in bonds?

First Soldier.

Ay, lord;

'Tis Nahash, Prince of Ammon; such fair spoil,

We would not slay him.

Jephth.

Did he yield himself?

Second Soldier. Nay, we o'erbore him; he had
slain us all,

So fierce the fury of fight in him, but we,
Seeking to pleasure thee, dared all his rage,
Flung ourselves on him, and so dragged him down,
And bound him thus.

Jephth. Could ye not slay him?

Third Soldier. Ay,

And e'en perchance had done it, but for one
Who came, and said he saw him spare thee.

Jephth. Me!

Now, by th' unhallowed names of every God
These heathen worship! Did he too avouch
That lie?

First Soldier. Nay: more, he railed on him who
spake,
And swore he had refused to fight with thee.

Jephth. That's true. Cut through those cords:
give him his spear.

[*To Nahash.*] And now, fair sir, come, seat thee by
my side.

Enter Jair.

Jair. Captain, a messenger from Ammon's king,
Thy prisoner's father—for I know the state
And favour of the Prince who sits by thee—
Craves audience, offering humbly terms of peace.

.

Jephth. Bid him come here.

Nah. No need, so please your grace.

My sire and I this morning, ere we parted
To take our separate stations in the field,
Agreed what each should offer, should defeat,
So oft endured, on this our latest stake
O'ershadow Ammon, and or he or I
Meet death or capture. Hear them then from me.
Those lands that lie from Arnon unto Jabbok,
We fought for them, have lost them, they are thine;
We cede them in all honour. 'Tis for thee
To say hereafter what thou wilt restore,
If one act, yet unmentioned, crown our peace.

Jephth. And what is this unpleaded article?

Nah. Swear to me by thy God, that thou wilt hear
In patience what I reverently tell;
Then will I speak; for, let who else will gibe,
There must be courtesy 'twixt thee and me.

Jephth. Bid me not swear; I have had oaths
enough,

As Jahveh knoweth; but, say on, in surety.

Nah. I love the Lady Thyrzah, and would make
Our marriage the main article of peace;
Her dowry to be such of these same lands

As it may please thee to bestow with her,
Which else I cede to thee. What sayest thou?

Jephth. [*Leaping up, and aside.*] God of my
fathers, spare—nay, strike me dead!

That would save all. [*Reseating himself.*

Tell me in honour, Prince;

How knowest thou my daughter?

Jair.

My good lord,

Slay him at once whose impious hands have dared,
If not, then his contaminating will,
To tamper with a maid of Israel!

Jephth. Silence, thou panther; all are not like
thee!

One more such slanderous hint, and by the throne—
Nay, no more vows! But get thee from my sight;
Thy face is an offence to me. Now, Prince.

Nah. My lord, thou hast a little captive girl,
Borne off from Rabbah in some early raid,
One Zipporah, the Lady Thyrzah's friend,
And they are close as sisters in their love,
As thou well knowest. Zipporah comes at whiles
To sojourn with her kin, and Magdiel,
To whom my soul is knit, who is to me
As Zipporah to Thyrzah, loveth her.

And Magdiel hath brought from her to me
Such tales of Thyrzah's beauty, and her gifts
Of nature and of teaching, as have fired
My soul with love for her. While war was hatched,
Ay, 'twas the very day we heard the news——

Jephth. While I was gathering head in Gilead,
And so my house lay open and unwatched.

Nah. Magdiel and I had wandered o'er the ridge
That sunders Ammonite and Hebrew lands,
And in a pinewood, resting for the noon,
We sat comparing each our loves and pains;
He sick for Zipporah, and I at odds
With fate and nature, in that I did yearn
Past hope and bearing for a stranger maid.

Jephth. [*To Jair.*] Jair, cease playing with thy
dagger there;

Or I'll strike off the hand that plays with it!

Nah. We plotted in all honesty, my lord;
He to gain speech of Zipporah, and I
To feast mine eyes once on thy daughter's face,
E'en should I buy the banquet with my blood.
For we went down to Mizpah all unarmed,
And, once espied, had died like common thieves—
Jair. And thieves ye were!

Jephth.

Silence, Gomorrah's spawn!

I bade thee leave us once! Off with thee now,
While yet thy venomous head is on thy trunk!

[*Exit Jair.*

Nah. I stood below the Lady Thyrzah's window,
Imploring pardon for the alien
Who came to tell her of his love; I found
She knew it all; for she and Zipporah
Had lighted on us, in some girlish quest,
Among the thickets over Mizpah; more,
Had listened to my foolish songs, and so
Had learned my love, my worship, and despair
At that fine pride wherewith fame dowered her.
For a brief while, how brief, how sweet to me,
Thou well may'st guess, we stood in colloquy;
She at her casement, I below; great sir,
'Twere treason, did I dare to hint that she
Heard passion's echo in that virgin clearance
Of her pure soul. One thing I fain would say;
She knew I was unarmed, and flung me this,
With no ill-will.

Jephth. [*Looking at the dagger.*] The little bag-
gage told me

She let it fall.

Nah. She bade me use it not
Save in some dire necessity; and then
She charged me with a sweet solemnity,
I dared not, e'en for honour, disobey,
Never to raise my hand against her sire.

Jephth. Sweet wretch, all men obey her, even I!

Nah. I left her then. Lord, I have told thee all;
Take me a willing captive at thy side;
If she confirm my hope, and thy mind lean
To seal so blessed and so large a league
Between our kindred peoples, well. If not,
Slay me, I shall be little loth to die;
Or send me home ransomed by misery,
For misery will be mine for evermore.

Jephth. Strange though this be, it rings like flaw-
less bronze
Upon an armourer's ear. Nahash, young friend,
There breathes no man, Hebrew or alien,
To whom as gladly would I give my girl,
As unto thee; but 'twixt us and the gift
There yawns a peril, vast and pitiless,
Like a black chasm riving a mountain side,
That must be met and passed, ere you and I
Can further talk.

Nah. There is no peril, lord,
I would not share with thee; and surely none
Which thou and I together could not meet
And master too.

Jephth. Hearken, and pity me.
Ere I set out upon this fatal war,
I, fronting my God's altar, vowed a vow,
Should he go forth before me, and bestow
The hosts of Ammon into these my hands,
As he hath done it, that whatever first
Should cross the threshold of my house to meet me,
However precious, I would make it his,
And it should bleed, ay, bleed, upon his altar;
Then I called on him to do so to me
And more, if I proved false to that my vow.

Nah. Ay, as thou said'st, the chasm is black
 enough!

Jephth. Scarce had the words died out on my rash
 lips,
Ere Thyrsah came leading a company
Of youths and maids, with tabret, cymbal, harp,
And choric dance and song; the sight of her
Smote me with such a terror as he feels,
And he alone—and there be few such men—

In whom the phantom of a giant fault
Rises to taunt him with his own undoing.
Since then, whenever through the day hath come
A lull in the war's work, or by some chance
My soldier's sleep hath failed me in the night,
I think on her, and quake, yes quake.

Nah.

Alas!

Is there no remedy?

Jephth.

Nay, none, save hope,

And that the slenderest; she may not come forth:
But little is that chance, she loves me so,
So eager is she, and so proud of me;
Me, who for paltry fame have risked her, me,
Who have thus played her like a gambler's stake,
Against thy father's kingdom, e'en 't may be,
Have bought her lover's capture with her blood.

Nah. Jephthah, the cattle on a thousand hills
Were dross to one drop of that priceless stream;
But we will sweep the herds of every tribe
From Jordan to Euphrates, and build up
On every hill top, and along all plains,
A myriad smoking mounds of sacrifice
To pacify thy God.

Jephth.

'Twere all in vain;

His jealousy stalks, like his power, supreme;
Aflame with living furies of his ire;
Nor will it brook to be assuaged with aught
Save the performance of my forfeit bond.
Yet would I dare to face it, could I know
His vengeful bolt would light on me alone,
And to a concourse of devouring winds
Would fling abroad these charred and splintered
limbs;

Or that the earth would gape and swallow me,
Me only, and, content, close up again.
But we have heard our hoary grandsires tell
How many blameless thousands died the death
When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram sinned,
Or, with the murmurers at Taberah,
Or, in that direst plague by Phineas stayed.
If she come out, then must I offer her,
Nor may I stir a hand to warn her back.
I have one hope; he ordered Abraham
To offer Isaac; when the child was laid
Blindfold along the faggots, and his sire
Had taken up the knife to slay his son,
He stayed his hand, and spared them both. Per-
chance,

One way or other, he may spare us now.

*[He rises, and puts his arm round the neck
of Nahash.*

Let us away together.

Nah.

Nay, not so;

I will not go with thee; no force, no prayer,
Shall stir me; neither for thy love nor fear
Will I with shameful meekness stoop to tread
A downward path, where every step I took
Would ring out my dishonour through the gloom
Of mine own soul. I swear she shall not die,
Till I lie dead; what, live, and know her slain,
And not have died to save her? Never!
Nature would curse me with ten thousand tongues;
The very winds would howl into mine ears
“Coward and Recreant”; the contemptuous pines
Would mutter through their gray beards o’er mine
head

“Coward and Recreant”; and the injured hills
Would tune their thunders to the self-same cry,
“Coward and Recreant.” Hearken, I stand here
Thy captive, thine to ransom or to slay;
Slay me; or ransom me and let me go,
Without or pledge or question. What to me

Thy Jahveh, with his thirst for innocent blood?
I know him for thy God of Battles proved
Mightier than Chemosh; unto me nought else;
I may brave any save my country's gods;
And stauncher they perchance may prove for me
In this new need; if not, thou couldst not name
The thing I would not dare! So, answer me;
My death or ransom?

Jephth.

Neither, gallant foe;

Thy death were shame, thy ransom, as 'tis asked,
Would work, as I have shown thee, widespread
wrath

And havoc on my people and my land.

Nah. [*Aside.*] There is no other way. Then,
Thyrzah, pardon!

[*Aloud.*] Lord, thou didst honour me a while
ago,

And wouldst have set the issue of this war
Upon our lives; I put aside thy grace,
Thou knowest why; I beg it of thee now.
If thou shouldst fall, I take my woeful way,
Mine honour and her life alike made sure;
And if I fall, then, dying, she shall know
How I too died for her.

Jephthah's Daughter. 73

Ay, gag her, blind her, bind her hand and foot,
Impound her in the wilderness, till we
Are safely housed in Mizpah! Ah, my soul,
This is almost like peace! Let us away. [*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

SCENE V.

A PASS IN THE HILL COUNTRY BETWEEN GILEAD
AND AMMON.

Enter Jair.

Jair.

IF I be worthy to achieve revenge,
Here is the method to my hand, and this
The moment. Ithamar must pass this way,
And stay to rest him here; poor fool, to pick
Me out of all the host of Gilead
With whom to trust thy secret, so well schemed,
So simple too, as all good counsels are!
Had he won safe to Mizpah, found the slut,
And told her all,—her father's vow and fear,
His loyalty to Jahveh, her own peril,
Her minion's capture, and the half-made pact
To leave our Jephthah Lord of Gilead,

And her mistress of Ammon, dowered with half
Those spoils the outlaw wins for Israel—
She would have fled into the nether darkness,
Ere she came forth. Intolerable jade,
Who flouts the lord of three and twenty towns;
Forsooth, she hath not learned to trust him yet!
Who asked her trust? I asked for her; but she
Must not be bought, so saith her upstart sire.
He called me "Panther"—learned of her, that
name—

Well, panther will I prove: "Gomorrhah's spawn"—
That was his own, that stank of him—for that
If for nought else, she dies; far worse that sting,
E'en than my suit disdained. I know full well
Maidens would flock to me in troops, if once
I stood and beckoned, with my back to her.

[*Hears footsteps.*]

But hark, the feet of one who runs; 'tis he;
Poor lout, he must die too; or else—to think
That from the simple pottage of my hate
Such savour of great issues should steam up—
If he escaped, her father would outplay
Great Jahveh's self, Gilead lose half its due,
And one whom he hath called my kinswoman

Be yielded to a heathen's arms. Oh Jair,
Wrought in the course of such high consequence,
Thy vengeance is but as a wild fruit plucked
Along the path of duty, and the death
Of this poor bungling peasant, Ithamar,
Another wayside incident. Enough;
Now to conceal me.

*[He strings his bow, and draws an arrow
from the quiver.]*

Nay; but this is strange:
I do believe he dressed this shaft for me,
One night in camp. Well, tis his fate, not mine.
[Exit.]

Enter Ithamar.

Itham. This is the spring; here will I rest and
eat.
I've gained some hours, e'en should impatience
push
My lord and Nahash to outstrip the host.
Yet must I hasten still: I might not find her
At my first search; she may need suasion too;
And I would win full time to bear her off
Out of harm's way. *[Opens his wallet.]*

'Tis well I filled my bag;
I shall lie one more night beneath the moon,
And I have found sleep in the open air
Makes over-hungry waking. Plump they are,
These kids of Ammon, and these barley cakes
The heathen maidens knead, surpassing sweet.
Now for a drink.

*[As he kneels at the spring, the twang of a
bowstring is heard. He leaps up, shriek-
ing, staggers round and catches sight of
Jair.]*

Jair! Oh, treachery!

[Falls senseless.]

*[Shortly after his fall a group of Ammonites
rush in and find him.]*

First Ammonite. But who lies here? 'Tis not
the man we chased;
He was far older, and more gaily dight.
Who killed this one?

Second Amm. He breatheth; bear him off,
He may be worth a ransom.

Third Amm. Draw the shaft.

First Amm. Nay, he will bleed to death.

Third Amm. Then bleed he must;

78 *Jephthah's Daughter.*

We cannot bear him far with this in him.

[*He draws out the arrow.*

Here, take my kerchief, plug the wound with it.

[*Looking at the arrow.*

'Tis a good shaft enough; 'twill do its office,

Perchance, more surely the next time.

[*Puts it in his own quiver.*

You there,

Bring branches for a litter. [*They bring them.*

So; 'tis well.

He is well clad, and may prove plunder yet.

[*Exeunt, carrying off Ithamar.*

ACT II.

SCENE VI.

IN THE PASS ABOVE MIZPAH.

Enter Nahash, Jephthah, and followers.

Jephthah.

THUS far, and nought hath happened; in an
hour

We shall look down on Mizpah close at hand.

Oh Nahash, never have I waited battle

Against ten times my numbers—as I have

Many a time and oft—as I wait this.

Now know I what it is to listen bound

For those dread words, “Carry him out.” I think,

If I ’scape this, no captive from to-day

Shall take death at my order. Hark, what ’s that?

In pity tell me! Hearest thou?

Nah.

I hear

The sound of pipe and tabret mounting up
As from the town.

Jephth. Jahveh, have mercy! Yield,
Or slay me now! [*The sounds approach.*
'Tis drawing very near.

Hark, hark, a song! It is her voice, it rings
Like a mad shriek within me! Nay, not that;
It is most musical; though there be death in it,
Yet will I listen. 'Tis for the last time.

[*Sinks down upon a rock.*

[*Choral song to accompaniment of flutes and
harps, with rhythmic beating of tabrets
and cymbals. Thyrsah's voice is distinctly
heard.*

Our foemen have fallen, have fallen, have fallen;
The Star of the Hebrews is Lord of the Day!
As dew upon Hermon, or frost over Ebal,
The hosts of the heathen have faded away.

The shafts of the righteous were swifter than eagles,
Like lightning the spears in the hands of the just;
Oh woe to you, woe, ye false children of Ammon,
Your arrows were fledglings, your weapons as rust.
[*Nahash starts.*

Jephthah's Daughter. 81

Jephth. Patience! She knows not that I have
thee here.

On high over Rabbah the summer sun seeth
No harvests that mellow, no cattle at feed;
Their herds are all dead in the smoke of the home-
stead,
Their husbandmen stark in their blood on the
mead.

Yet bright were the valleys from Arnon to Jabbok,
And bright shall they be when we plough them
again;
Though now there be sighing, and crying, and
wailing,
And all else be still in the homes of the Plain.

Nah. If only she will come and be their sun!

Oh tremble, ye Gods, before Jahveh the Mighty,
As Milcom hath fallen, so Chemosh shall fall,
And Dagon, and Ashtaroath, Moloch, and Baal,
The wrath of his arm is uplifted on all.

82 *Jephthah's Daughter.*

The oath that he sware unto Abraham standeth;
Our numbers shall grow as the sand of the sea;
The heathen shall fail before Israel's children;
The fairest of earth shall our heritage be.

Oh heir to his promise, oh Jacob his chosen,
The stars in their courses sang loud at thy birth,
"Lo thiu and thy seed shall be lords of the nations,
To carry his name to the ends of the earth."

He cometh, the day-star of Mizpah, he cometh—

*[Thyrzah and her companions appear at the
side of the stage. They see the attitude of
Jephthah, Nahash and the rest, and
break off the song abruptly.]*

Jephth. *[Rushing forward.]* My daughter! Thy-
zah! Where's young Ithamar?

Thyrz. Is he not with thee?

Jephth. Nay. But where? He left
To warn thee; he is lost; some wandering band
Of Ammonites have met him on his way;
And we are all lost too; thou, Nahash, I;
Uncharged by me, he thought to save us all;
But, as a whirlwind brushing a poor breeze

Out of a tempest's track, Jahveh hath baulked

The loving purpose of the hapless boy!

Thyrz. But why? Why lost? Who talks of loss
to-day?

Save the Prince Nahash, and for him—

Jephth. My child,

That day which saw me lord of Gilead,

I did let loose this thrice-accursèd tongue,

And vowed a vow—I cannot now go back—

Thyrz. A vow! That vow which frightened thee?
whereto

I held thee? Is it me whom thou hast vowed?

Jephth. Ay, thee, ay, thee!

Thyrz. [*Looking heavenwards, and letting her
cymbals fall.*]

Then, if it be thy will,

Thou mighty one, whose presence in our host

Hath wrought us this salvation, to redeem

Thy people by my death, take me, I die.

Jephthah for this had died a thousand deaths,

And shall his Thyrzah flinch before one knife!

I can but echo mine old utterance,

The daughter of the lord of Gilead

Shall die as it becomes her. Ere he went,

I gave my voice for honour and for war,

With all its chance. The chance hath come. No
more.

[*To Jephthah, who gives signs of speaking.*] Nay,
not a word, my father! 'Twould undo me!

Let none come near me; I must stand alone.

[*To Nahash, who makes as though he would approach her.*] Back, Nahash, back! Jahveh hath
sundered us.

(*Scene closes.*)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

IN THE HOUSE OF JEPHTHAH.

*Jephthah, Nahash, the Priest of Jahveh, and officers
and attendants.*

Nahash.

MAY I not see her once again? The term
Of her vain respite draweth to a close;
All hope is dead within me, whether bred
Of thy resolve or hers; my prayers have beat
Like winds against a mountain crest; I know
That she and I must die, and do but ask
This bitter boon of farewell.

Priest.

Oh, young Prince,

If 'tis so bitter, and 'tis all, why ask it?

Nah. 'Tis bitter, barren bitter, and 'tis all;

Sir Priest.

[*To Jephthah.*] I ask it, lord, because she knows not

Think no shame;

These tears are but for thee and her. Now, go;

I trust her to thine honour.

[*To the Priest, who rushes forward.*] Let him pass:

And stay thou here; for thee I do not trust.

[*To Nahash.*] Son, Nahash—so to call thee is to
pour

Balm into this torn heart, which clings to thee

As a wrecked pine, with all its crown reversed,

And roots upwrenched, in ruin, loops an arm

About some neighbour trunk—I pity thee,

He knows I pity thee, and for myself

Am past both hope and dread. I could gulp down

Damnation like a mess of doctor's stuff,

Would that cure all! Dear lad, I hardly know

Whose fate 'tis, hers or thine, that most doth swell

The main flood of my misery; for she

Was part of me, with me to rise or fall;

To stride the ridge whereto my valour clomb,

And share my folly's plunge into the abysm:

Thou wast not born for this; thy clash with us

Hath shattered thee.

Nah.

Father,—nay, shudder not;

Didst thou not call me son?—My life was set,

When but a fountain bubbling at its birth,
Towards confluence with thine; the twain have
made,

Though late, one stream. When first I pledged my
vows

To our sweet Thyrzah, I renounced my land,
My people and their Gods, and clothed my soul
With her and hers; my will is hers, to die
With her, and thine, to let her die. Nay, nay,

[Jephthah weeps.]

No tears for me! My happiness blazed forth
In splendour all too sudden and too close;
All looked so near—the throne that she should share,
The home that she should grace, the plenty, peace,
The ancient feud 'twixt Gilead and Ammon
In our alliance quelled—alas, alas!

I was well warned how perilous 'twas, it struck
My spirit as on some still afternoon,
While Nature puts on her deceitful calm,
Strikes on the wary shepherd's long-trained eyes
That clearness of the hills which bodeth storm.
I go; give me a body-guard, and, if thou wilt,
A watch. I would not now that I were slain,
By Jäir or another—if there be

Ought else like him in Gilead—until all

Be over.

Jephth. [To an Officer.] Go with him forthwith,
and take

Some fifty with thee staunch as thou.

Officer.

Our lives

On his safe conduct.

Jephth.

Thanks—farewell, farewell.

[*Exeunt Nahash and officer.*

(Scene closes.)

ACT III.

SCENE II.

A SECLUDED SPOT IN THE MOUNTAINS OF GILEAD.

Thyrzah and Zipporah.

Thyrzah.

SO have we come to my last eventide;
I shall behold the sun go down no more.
How dark the stretch of purple mountains shows
Below the tawny gold and crimson fires
The great orb leaves behind him: their deep shades
Befit the veil wherein mine early death
Enshrouds the lot that had been mine, if fate
Had out of my sequestered maidenhood
Borne me through wedlock's defiles. Night falls fast.

Zipp. Alas, how fast!

Thyrz. Not faster than have fallen
The days, one after other, in these months

I madly asked. How hath it profited
To wander with a weeping company,
And multiply my death a hundred fold?
For day by day I die; and every night
In dreams I see the altar, feel the knife,
And wake, only to stare into the dark,
And murmur shivering, "It is still to come."
Well, 'twill have come to-morrow.

Zipp.

Thyrzah, Thyrzah,

My sister, more than sister, list to me!
Let me die for thee; I would gladly die;
'Tis true; I would right gladly die. Bethink thee;
We both went forth to meet them; I will swear
Thou stayed'st to fetch thy cymbals, and so I
Stept o'er the threshold first. Let me go down,
And tell them this! Thy father will believe it,
The priests, the people, will rejoice to take
An Ammonite for victim, to set free
A daughter of their race, and bring back peace
To their great captain's heart. Nay, let me go;
I shall die joyfully; and all being o'er,
They shall come here, and fetch thee home; thy
sire,
Prince Nahash, and all Gilcad.

Thyrz. Sweet girl,

Thy wish itself is balm, but it is vain:

Thou'rt not my father's.

Zipp. Am I not his thrall?

Thyrz. His thrall, but not his own, bone of his
bone,

Flesh of his flesh, his love, his joy, his pride,

The jewel of his home, as I have been.

This were to palter with his vow, not pay it.

And how could'st thou believe that I who am

Thy sister, save in blood, would see thee bleed?

Zipp. I do beseech thee, let me go; I swear

By thy God, as by mine, I fain would die;

Death were a boon to me.

Thyrz. Devoted child!

Think upon Magdiel, and the happiness

That waits you both together.

Zipp. Magdiel!

Oh name him not; I love him not; I love—

Thyrz. Whom?

Zipp. [*Kneeling.*] But to show why 'tis I long
to die,

I'll tell thee: misery, and the one hope

Still mine, that I may save thee, wring it from me.

I love the Prince of Ammon!

Thyrz.

What! rash girl,

How dared'st thou tell me? Ere we came up here
I should have slain thee on thy knees; as 'tis,
Thy words—not that I stumbled—have made firm
The feet of my resolve. Unhappy one!
I can but pity those who love and suffer.
Go thou within; for though I feel for thee,
Wellnigh as might a mother for a child
Smitten by hopeless passion long concealed,
So much have I of this life left in me,
I could not, while I breathe, behold thee turn
On mine affianced lover hungering eyes,
However hopeless were the famine in them.

[Exit Zipporah.]

Thyrz. [Alone.] And now he comes; were 't well
to have repulsed

His plea for some few moments of farewell?
I know myself, and know I shall not yield.
Can I trust him? Oh, Jahveh, hear me swear—
And no less surely than my father swore—
That should an instant come, of fear supreme,
That he should seize and bear me hence, this dagger

[Half drawing it.]

Shall thwart him; and do thou accept my deed,
As though it were the sacrificial blade
That let my life out by a priestly hand;
And so may we, my father and his child,
With all thy servants, stand absolved of thee.
Then, if the soul of this young Ammonite
Be a fit mate for mine, as I fall down,
Ere yet mine eyes have grown too dim to see him,
He'll make my blade to do its work again;
If not—I shall die knowing him for one
On whom my life and love were flung away:
And he may live, and wed with Zipporah.

Enter Nahash.

Nah. Art thou alone?

Thyrz. Alone with my resolve;
And thou?

Nah. As thou art, love, alone with mine.

Thyrz. And what is thine?

Nah. [*Showing his dagger.*] My Thyrzah, I but
live

To die with thee. I do but wait the chance
Of failure in thy father at the last,
Or else some marvel such as that, he says,

Befell thy grandsire Abraham in like case;
If nought avail, no sooner shall the Priest
Uplift his murderous hand, than I raise mine;
Two blades shall flash before th' unflinching sun,
And so thy Jahveh, if he loveth blood,
Shall quaff a double stream.

Thyrz.

Oh Nahash, Nahash,

My lion-hearted love, an hour ago
I could have bidden thee do thy will, and die
On the same stroke of Time with me; that so
We two, without a farewell, might become
A part of things beyond, whate'er they be.
But now—

Nah. And why not now?

Thyrz.

Question me not;

Mine answer lieth in a casket locked,
And other hands than mine must turn the key.
Perchance one day, when thou and Zipporah
Have grown to think and talk of me, as one
Of that mute company beneath the mould,
Thou shalt tell her, or she tell thee, or both
May light on it together.

Nah.

Thyrzah, Thyrzah,

Our lives before we love are but as preludes

Unto the life which cometh when we love;
Love is life's melody, and when it ceaseth,
It leaveth but one echo, misery.
Our meeting showed a bright cause for the days
That went before; our parting would leave Time
A purposeless succession of vain hours.
How canst thou ask me to live after thee!
We travelled on two flowery paths that led
Each to the summit where we met; could one
Turn back, and tread the withered ways alone?

Thyrz. [Aside.] He loves so well, my hint
glanced off from him

Like a foiled arrow from a fortress wall.

[Aloud.] Oh how I love! My soul soars up; it gazes,
Proud as an eagle, down on all this world,
Far, far below! I need no more of life,
This moment is enough! Now could we pass

[Drawing her dagger.]

With one swift plunge out into vastness! Say;
What if I bade thee draw thy knife, and strike
Home to thy heart, while I struck home to mine?
Wouldst do it?

Nah. [Rushing forward with his dagger uplifted.]

Do it! Say but "Strike," my queen!

One word, and we lie dead together! Speak!

Thyrz. [*Lowering her arm.*] Nay, not e'en this
may be! The vow, his vow,

Fronts us where'er we turn; all else is forfeit!

I am o'erwrought: go; but not far away:

I fain would know through my last hours of vigil,

That thou art near. Good night; 'tis but good
night,

And then, good morrow; and the rest all ours!

Good night, beloved. Life were nought apart,

And Death is nought together. Die with me!

Nah. Die with thee, love! I will outwatch this
night,

As though its hours made the last day that lingered

Before our bridal evening! Die with thee!

I would it were to-morrow, and all done!

(Scene closes.)

ACT III.

SCENE III.

A PUBLIC PLACE IN GILEAD,

A great altar of turf erected in the midst.

A Priest, and a large concourse of people assembled.

Jephthah seated in an attitude of great dejection.

Near him stand Nahash and Jair. Below the altar stands Thyrzah deeply veiled; her maidens are grouped about her.

The sacrificial knife is laid upon the altar.

All, except Nahash, who wears the dagger given to him by Thyrzah, are unarmed.

The Priest advances with the intention of addressing the assemblage; but, ere he can do so, Ithamar rushes in.

Ithamar.

HOLD! Treason, treachery!

Jephth. [*Springing to his feet.*] What!

Ithamar!

Whence comest thou?

[*Thyrzah and her maids throw back their veils.*

Itham.

Ask him, yon traitor there!

[*Pointing to Jair.*

After thy victory at Aroer,
Dear lord, I left the camp, that self-same night;
So dire a dread thy words had raised in me
For my sweet foster-sister. My intent
Was, all unknown to thee, to bear her news
Of this impending peril, and to pray her
To fly with me out of the way of harm.
Had she refused, I knew a band of youths
Who, at my call, had lent me loving force,
And borne her off. By most unhappy chance
I told yon villain of my purpose. He
Outstarted me, and by a well-known spring,
Where travellers stay for water and for shade,
Lay waiting me; and while I knelt to drink,
In coward fashion drew his bow on me.
I rose and turned, and saw him as he fled,
Called him by name, and fell. I must have stayed
Long senseless, for I woke to find myself
Tended among a kindly company
Of wandering Ammonites. My wound hath healed,

And I am here too late to save her, not
Too late to call for instant death on him,
Who would have slain me, and whose malice fell
Hath wrought the havoc of this woeful day.

Jephth. [*To Jair.*] What sayest thou to this?

Jair. The slave hath lied;

I know not why, nor care.

Jephth. Yet thou didst quit

My camp when I rebuked thy slanderous hints
About my Thyrzah and Prince Nahash here.
Say, whither wentest thou?

Jair. I took my band

In quest of scattered foes, and, if thou wilt,
Of plunder. Trust thy yapping foster-cub,
If so it please thee. [*Turning away.*]

Itham. Stay! What meaneth this?

The shaft which he who tended me drew forth
Out of my side, and which I know for mine;
Dressed by these fingers; giv'n, great lord, to him
On that last evening ere the fight!

Jair. [*After a pause.*] No more:

I do avow the deed; were 't still to do,
I'd do it. But for me, this busy fool
Had baulked great Jahveh, making cheap to thee

The glib devotion of thine upstart tongue;
 And she, whom I, a prince of Gilead,
 Had deigned to ask in marriage, had been made
 The harlot of yon mincing Ammonite.

Jephth. Can murderous treachery flaunt itself so
 loud!

Seize him, and bear him out, and strangle him
 Forthwith, lest I be tempted to the deed!

*[Several of those present rush forward, but
 before they can reach Jair, he springs back,
 plucks the dagger from the belt of Nahash,
 and stabs him. Nahash falls.]*

Jair. *[Flings down the dagger.]* I was in time;
 now seize me, if ye will.

My vengeance is achieved: nay, this same boy
 Hath brought it to a head; I know not else
 How I had slain the Ammonite. *[He is borne off.]*
*[Ithamar picks up the dagger and rushes off
 the stage.]*

Thyrz. *[Who has thrown herself down by the side
 of Nahash, and has her head upon her knee.]*

Sweet love,
 Is the pain great?

Nah. *[Faintly.]* Alas, he struck too soon

For us to die together: lay thy lips
One moment upon mine.

[She does so; Nahash dies.]

Thyrz. *[Laying him down.]* Dead, dead, yes,
dead!

We did not look for it like this, my love.
I would it had been by thine own dear hand
And not that traitor's.

*Re-enter Ithamar; he throws himself at the feet of
Thyrzah.*

Itham. He is dead! I slew him!
And with this knife; I cannot call it cursed
Now it hath drunk his blood.

Thyrz. *[After spreading her veil over the body of
Nahash.]* My Ithamar,

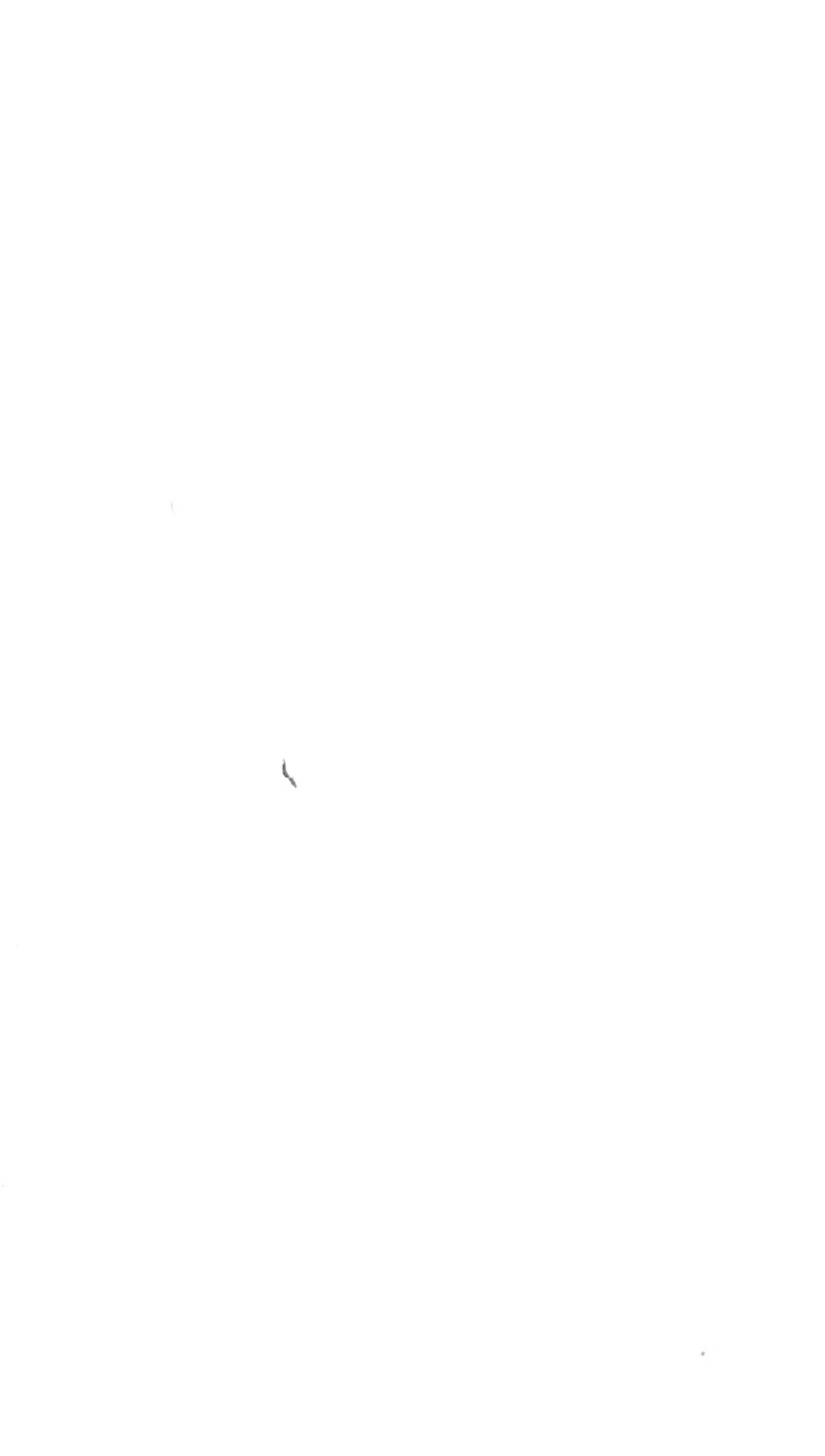
I may not thank thee for thy deed; but this
[Kissing him.]

Is for the loving heart that would have saved me.
Father, farewell; Nahash, I come.

[Reaching out her left hand.]

Now, Priest.

*[As the Priest moves towards her the curtain
falls.]*



WRITTEN TO A TYROLESE MELODY.

SO then, farewell; they came and went,
Those few choice hours of sweet content,
How slowly reached, how swiftly spent,
From dawn to noon and gloaming!
We heard the skylark's opening strain,
Felt the rich heat through lime and plane,
And smitten deep with sunset's pain,
Marked happy wild birds homing.

With lingering steps we brushed the dew,
Heart-tempered to the twilight hue,
Our sighs like false notes breathing through
The lute of summer gladness:
The moon had risen against the sun,
The nightingale her plaint begun,
Her olden griefs were all outdone,
By our unspoken sadness.

106 *Written to a Tyrolese Melody.*

What cared we for the pale moon's ray!
'Twas but a phantom of our day;
The stars crept forth, but what were they
To us who had no morrow?
The moon seemed as in mockery set,
Her beams a gibe, "Go ye, forget!"
The stars but teardrops of regret
On the broad face of Sorrow.

NOTES IN TRAVEL:

1904.

NOTES IN TRAVEL: 1904.

ROME.

THEY came, they were sweet, they are over,
Those days that we dreamed of so long
In the lands for whose chaplets are blended
Love, liberty, sunlight, and song.

To Rome, as of old, and as ever
We shall while our hearts still beat,
Reclaiming a joy and a duty,
We hurried with eager feet;

Like swallows, their long flight ended,
Who light on a well-known scene,
And welcome the smoke-wreath curling
From roofs where their nests have been.

Albeit the hours there garnered
 Were straitened, they were not in vain,
 For even the sense of their losing
 Grows faint in a fragrance of gain.

We chafed at the zeal of her Sages
 Who vex the Imperial Shade,
 Half roused from her slumber of ages
 By the stroke of their mattock and spade;

We lingered in cloister and garden,
 In the shadow of pillared fanes,
 Looked forth on the fair hills bounding
 The sweep of the mystic plains;

And mingled, like charms in a potion,
 Palm, colonnade, cypress, and dome—
 The chalice of magical odours
 That breathe from the Rose of Old Rome.

Unaging enchantress of ages,
 Whose philtres we know for divine
 In the surge of our answering pulses
 That heave to the measures of thine!

Roma, Amor, twin names of one framing,
For ever, though playfully, knit;
They shall write and re-write one another
While either remains to be writ!

Then pardon us, Roma, beloved,
Nor deem it a treason of soul
That makes thee a portal of travel
Instead of its haven and goal.

SICILY.

I.

YE gay Sicilian Muses,
Whose measures our Maro sang,
From whom into rhythmical fullness
The bright "Idyllion" sprang,

Of a surety your songs, oh Muses,
Were songs of your sun and your soil,
With sparks of the fires of Etna,
And a smack of the wine, and the oil,

Wild garlic, and thyme, and parsley,
Rude savour, and swarthy glow,
From the caper of goats on your hillsides
To the loves of your peasants below.

But why did ye fail of the softness
That lies like a bloom on your land,
The white foam-curl of the waters
As they stretch out a lip to the sand,

And the down of the pine and the olive
That softens the mountain side,
But leaves to the kiss of the sunlight
The swell of the uplands wide?

And why are ye mute, why sing not
The debt ye have owed to man
Since the reign of the cactus, and aloes,
The orange, and maize, began?

Shall never a son, ye Muses,
Of the Theocritean mould
Arise at your call, and worship
With more than his force of old,

To sing Trinacria's story,
The blend of the Grecian blood,
The Carthaginian pirates,
The rise of the Roman flood,

And swift in the wake of its ebbing
The flash of the Vandal sword,
The Saracen's fiery sojourn,
And swoop of the Norman horde;

With tears for the wreck and the ruin,
 And the sigh of a loving rhyme,
 For the sun of that civic beauty
 That hath sunk in the waves of Time!

Selinus and Agrigentum,
 Panormus and Syracuse,
 Egesta and Tauromenium,
 Are themes for the poet's use;

And Etna, the crown of your island,
 Queen-model of mountain piles,
 With bastion shoulders spreading
 To her base of a hundred miles,

With kirtle of vineyard and cornland,
 And girdle of forests wide,
 And wimple of snows, and steam-wreath
 Bewraying her heart of pride,

That prisoneth deep in her vastness
 The throes of her mother Earth,
 Like some great polity curbing
 The passions that gave it birth.

Wake then, ye slumbering Muses,
Relive in the life of your land,
Nor leave Trinacria's harp-strings
To be plucked by an alien hand.

SICILY.

II.

O H still-born fane of Egesta,
That never wast tenanted,
Where never an altar smouldered,
And never a victim bled,

Or ever thy roof was o'er thee,
Or the floor of thy "Cella" laid,
The hands and the hearts that reared thee
Were stilled in the Punic raid.

'Tis ours but to gaze and to wonder,
And leave thee alone to thy gloom
In the circlet of desolate mountains
That are to thy death as a tomb;

And to turn to the comely Girgenti,
A hoyden who dwelleth at ease
With the wind in her olive tresses,
And her feet in the fawning seas,

Who, decked with her temples for trinkets
That make even ruin gay,
Lies couched in a languorous beauty
And toys with her own decay.

We glance and we waft her our farewell,
A kiss from a careless hand,
And come with a soberer greeting
To the Queen of the southern strand.

From the height of that mute theatre,
Whose porches and colonnade
Heard Aeschylus read "*Agamemnon*,"
And saw "*Eumenides*" played,

We gazed on the noble haven
Where Freedom with stern set brows,
And eyes like the eyes of Medusa,
Abashed the Athenian prow,

And gave to confusion and slaughter,
As hounds of a recreant breed,
The sons of the heroes who won her
From the grasp of the tyrant Mede.

And we haunted the murderous quarries,
 Where, bending her head for shame
 Of the Furies that call her Mother,
 And the deeds that are done in her name,

The Goddess, who dyed her pinions
 In Marathon's mead blood-red,
 Now folded them stained and shattered
 O'er the flower of her Athens dead.

In the spot where they sank by thousands,
 The shambles where no blood flowed,
 That mercy their foe denied them
 Hath generous Nature showed.

There roses climb to the sunlight,
 And ivy trails in the shade
 Of the cypress, and orange, and olive
 Of their own Cephisian glade;

While ever from branch and blossom
 The chaunt of the bird and the bee,
 With the incense of many a perfume
 Unite in a liturgy;

And the pitiless crags, whose echoes
 Rang wild to their groans and their cries,
Are as aisles of a vast cathedral
 Laid bare to the hope of the skies,

Where Nature, abiding a priestess,
 Bids all her acolytes raise
Fresh anthems of love and of sorrow
 Through the long south summer days.

Farewell, Sicilian Muses!
 And thou, most favoured of isles!
From the height of thy calm Taormina
 We basked in thy latest smiles;

Taormina, who offereth nothing
 To be felt, to be told, to be known,
Content, like a soulless woman
 To rule by her charms alone;

And thence by Charybdis and Scylla,
 Less cruel, 'twould seem, than of yore,
We passed, looking back on thy beauty,
 To thine Italy's parent shore.

GREECE.

I. THE IONIAN ISLANDS.

FROM the deck of an Austrian steamer,
In the haven of happy Corfu,
To Italy's elder sister
We offered our homage due;

And thought of Corcyra's story,
The slaughter and civic rage,
That curdle and flame for ever
On the grim Athenian's page;

Nor failed of the gentler vision
That told how Odysseus of yore,
Fulfilling the wrath of Poseidon,
Lay wrecked on Phaeacia's shore;

And we sighed for the royal maiden
Whose heart, like a fated thing
That stretches its arms to ruin,
Went out to the hero king;

While he, with a godlike purpose,
Held fast to another doom,
To the hands and the hope undying
That wrought at the endless loom;

And vain was the delicate longing,
The ruth of the Gods above,
The courtesy higher than regal,
And frankness as noble as love.

Oh Odyssee, poem of poets,
Unsullied, eternally true,
First epic of love, and the loveliest
That ever a master drew,

There is none in the sheaf of thy pages
That is wrought with a hand more sure
Than the sweet Nausicaa's story,
So gentle and sad and pure!

By scant Albanian woodlands,
Whose fringes the foam-flakes fret,
We sailed, with our souls still clouded
In a haze of unnamed regret;

And coasted by Ithaca's mountains,
 Rude Ithaca, term of the song,
 And hearth of the hero's longing,
 That held not her hero long;

For he, with his heart of a rover,
 Grown sated of home and of ease,
 In quest of the lost Atlantis
 Went sailing the western seas.

So we, by that headland of Leucas,
 Renamed "Of our Lady of Woes,"
 Which every poet has sung of,
 And every lover knows,

And best, for her lone sad ending,
 Tenth star of Apollo's quire,
 The fairest of all fair women
 That have wasted in passion's fire ;

Who, flinging their worth to the worthless,
 In a barter of gold for dross,
 Have turned unto death as a haven
 From fever and tears and loss.

We strained our eyes through the sunset
To the rocks where they shelved to the glow,
And dreamed that we saw her totter
Ere she plunged to the waves below,

And marked as she met the waters
The beat of the long white plume,
That told of a late found mercy
In the goddess who wrought her doom,

And we prayed that those winnowing pinions
Might bear her away to her rest,
In some fortunate isle of beauty
Deepset in the boundless west.

GREECE.

II. OLYMPIA AND DELPHI.

FROM the islands of myth and of love-theme,
Where history dozed in her dawn,
We turned to the Dorian homeland,
Chief nurse of the nymph and the faun;

Where Life sat playing her preludes,
And Time like a melody ran,
And meadow, and grove, and hillside
Flung flowers to the capers of Pan.

We marked where the white Erymanthus
Keeps ward o'er Achæan towns,
Saw Arcady's circlet of mountains,
And those Cyllenian downs,

Where Hermes, a waif of Olympus,
At ease among thymy rocks,
For love of his sunbrown Dryope
Piped to her father's flocks.

We threaded Olympia's "Altis,"
Through many a holy site;
Fulfilled of his fragrance and sunlight,
We clomb up Cronium's height;

Where the breath of the pine and the myrtle,
The scents of the bush and the weed,
The hum of the bees, and the bird-songs,
Were as hymns of an outworn creed.

And again it was ours, that worship,
While we mused upon Delphi's crest,
Of the dead faith, mother of beauty,
Who lay with her fanes at rest,

O'erwatched by the gray Parnassus,
With Castaly bending near,
To pour for the lone sad mountain
His gift of a living tear.

Oh dead faith, mother of beauty!
But why do we talk of thy death,
While hearts who have learned and love thee
Still flush with the glow of thy breath?

It may be thy temples moulder,
Thine altars in fragments lie,
That thy groves have fall'n to the spoiler,
And their fountains are choked and dry;

That cymbal and flute are silent,
And hushed is the sacred song,
And dryad and faun no longer
Peep out on the dancing throng,

As it winds under ilex and myrtle,
Or covert of holy pine,
While the breeze is swaying the garlands
On the doors of the ready shrine.

But still is thy spirit upon us,
And still what our childhood knew,
In the grasp of a deeper meaning,
Our manhood may hold for true;

And Here, and Zeus, and Phoebus,
Athene, and Artemis,
Pan, Hermes, and Aphrodite,
Shall reign as divinities,

So long as our yearnings for worship
Take shape at the sight of a shrine,
And Nature within and without us
Shall seem to our souls divine.

GREECE.

III. ATHENS.

O H gray Corinthian waters,
 Made dark by a moody sky,
 Ye grudged us a sight of your borders,
 Sweet Phocis and Arcady,

Till night, in a league with the heavens,
 Hid all from our loyal gaze,
 Crowned Salamis, lone Aegina,
 And a necklace of purple bays.

And dark lay the cloven isthmus,
 And scarce could Peiraeus show
 His welcome of lamp and beacon,
 That blinked in a fitful row;

And long was the wearisome landing,
 And longer the jolting ride
 O'er the grave of the "Macra Teiche"
 First-born of imperial pride;

Ere jaded, and sore, and aching,
Our eyes overcome of sleep,
We were borne, unaroused, unwitting,
By the foot of the Sacred Steep.

Athenae, our sunlit Athenae,
Our queen of the violet wreath,
With thy marble diadem o'er thee,
And thy carpet of flowers beneath!

Alas for thy slopes of Hymettus
Laid bare by Mussulman hands,
And the whispering breadths of Ilissus
That are lost in the sun-dried sands;

Alas for thy groves of Colonus,
Where Oedipus moaned his wrong
In the thickets of olive and myrtle
That thrilled to the nightingale's song;

But what if the bird be wanting,
And what if the hill be bare,
The words of the poet haunt us
And the spirit of song is there.

And neither the axe nor the hammer,
Nor smooth-paced malice of Time,
Arch-hater of all things human—
To whom man's punier crime

Is less than a babe to a giant,
'Than a torch to the noontide rays—
Can rob thee of Marathon's marshes
And thy day of a million days,

That day when thy handful of heroes,
Grim mowers with fields to mow,
Swept down through the wondering gorges
On a no less wondering foe;

And fattened the feathering fennel
With choicest of Persian gore,
Made solid the swamp with corpses,
And cumbered the curve of the shore.

So too with thy mute Eleusis;
Who treadeth the sacred way
Through the smooth pine-sprinkled hillsides
To the marge of her lonely bay,

But sees, as with eyes of her mystics,
The serious cavalcade wind
To the shrines and the bloodless altars
Of the creed of the nobler mind,

And sends back a sigh through the ages
For the hopes that must ever be,
The cloud, and the doubt, and the dreamers
That have dreamed and will dream as he!

Farewell to thee, pearl among cities,
Sweet Poesy's stateliest home,
Why cannot a poet love thee
With a love like his love of Rome?

Perchance it is true, oh Athenae,
Whilst thou in thy widowhood
Dost glisten as cold as marble,
She glows as with flesh and blood,

And holdeth the hearts that she captured
Or ever we came to thee,
Invincible, sure, a Calypso
Who brooks no Penelope.

GREECE.

IV. CORINTH.

ONCE more to the Peloponnesus
We turned us, with heart and eyes,
Like sated revellers, weary
Of our banquet of memories;

And so, beneath Acro-Corinthus,
As we crouched in the nameless fane,
We prated of wind on the summit,
And cloud over mountain and plain;

But, frank as a conclave of augurs,
We knew that our plea was "rest";
And we laughed with our singer singing
In a doggrel of shallow jest,

"My bones are the bones of the lazy,
My limbs are the limbs of the limp,
I'm an oyster whose hinges are crazy,
Or a loose-coated, faint-footed shrimp!"

So flung we aside the longing
 To gaze, as the eagles gaze,
On the delicate neck of the isthmus
 That sunders the sister bays,

And holds, as a stalk, Morea,
 Her "Leaf of the Mulberry tree,"
To the land that hath wellnigh left her
 Adrift in the southern sea.

Thus back from the wrecks of Corinth
 To the hovels that bear her name
We drove, through the mocking sunset,
 In a silence that brooded a shame.

GREECE.

V. MYCENAE AND EPIDAUROS.

A ROUSED from our one day of languor,
With a touch of Tragedy's wand,
As we stood by the gate of Mycenae,
We snapped the ignoble bond;

And peered through the vacant portal,
Whereover the lions bend,
At the cave where the fated Orestes
Held parle with his warder friend,

Saw the postern that speeded him flying
From the Furies—his murder done—
Who hounded the mother-slayer,
Albeit th' avenging son;

And we trod with the sad Electra
Her path to her father's tomb,
Where Nemesis heaped on Atreides
The guerdon of Ilion's doom;

Then turned from the House of Pelops,
With its record of lust and blood,
To bathe our hearts in the sweetness
Of Greece in her sweetest mood.

Epidaurus, ay, sweet Epidaurus,
Our latest of memory's claims;
For Nauplia hath but her beauty,
And Argos and Tiryns are names.

But round about sweet Epidaurus
A goodlier effluence clings
Than the torture of tragic Furies
And the stories of murdered kings;

On the breeze of her flowery borders
Still floateth a holy wraith,
The Angel of health and mercy
Of the bland Asclepian faith,

To breathe over slab and pillar,
As she bendeth her viewless head,
A kiss and a sigh to the record
Of the vows of a thousand dead.

We stood in the stately theatre,
 In the first of the evening glow,
You perched on the topmost benches,
 And I in the "Scené" below;

And there did I waken its echoes
 To a touch of their antique use,
With fragments of Theban story,
 And snatches of Byron's muse.

Then silently, sadly, we lifted
 Our eyes to the sinking sun,
And we knew when we left Epidaurus
 That the days we had dreamed of were done.

THE DEATHBED
OF
LEONARDO DA VINCI.

PROLOGUE.

WAS it the soul of the man I heard,
 Living in him through that autumn day,
 Just when the first of the woods were blurred,
 Just when the first of the lawns were gray?

Mild, irresolute, dweller apart,
 Lover of all that he never knew,
 Squandering wealth of science and art,
 Scornor of all that a man might do;

Shorn of solace in love and fame,
 Exile, dying an old man lone—
 Was it from him that the spirit came
 Down into words that I knew for my own?

“Songs that never a sea-wind sang,
 Ripples that never a sea-breast rode,
 Answers of echoes that never rang,
 Glories a sunset never showed,

“Chords that never a lute-string stirred,
Lilt of a line that was never penned,
Melodies never in tone or word,
Flashes of thought that had never an end,

“Perfume never on leaf or flower,
Tears that never a sorrow bred,
Memory cradled in never an hour,
Raptures never alive or dead,

“Dreams that never the dreamer knew,
Shapes that never a vision wrought,
Breaking of lights that never brake through,
Sea-spoils never to surface brought,

“Splendour of eyes that never could shine,
Sighs of a passion that never could be—
These, and a host of their kin divine,
Ever were better than truths to me.”

THE DEATHBED OF LEONARDO DA VINCI.

A BOWSHOT out of Amboise upon Loire,
Girdled three sides by chestnut, oak, and elm,
But open southward to a lawn, that spreads
Its fringe of hazel-alleys and clipt yew
Between a tall belt and a quiet stream,
Still stands the little towered house of Cloux.

A gift it was by royal Francis made
To one who surely was himself a king,
Supreme in art, albeit he hath bequeathed
Too little to that world wherein he reigned.
For scant, no less than sovereign in kind,
His work uplifts a voice imperious,
Claiming its crown, as 'twere an appanage
By right divine, but proffering us withal
Few gifts in largesse for our homage given.

There, in a chamber opening to the west,
Lay he, this Leonardo, dying; none

Of all that group whom he had loved and taught,
Save one, had followed him to exile; gone
Beltraffio the unstable, in whose soul
The coward qualms of monkish training bred
Had stamped out love and reverence at the last;
Gone too Salai, bearing plundered sheaves
Of delicate conceptions, priceless notes
Of brush and pencil, to construct therefrom,
With facile hand and heart well mated, works
Goodly enough, but rising unavowed
On stolen foundations of the master's mind.
Gone too the others, meaner underlings
And trencher-students, since the stream of gains,
That fed his never-tiring bounty, failed;
And one alone, the last, a Milanese,
The young Francesco Melzi, now was left
To note his latest utterance: and I,
A twentieth-century lover of the man,
His meekness, sadness, virgin purity,
And timorous spirit of wide wavering power,
Have grown, as I have pondered, half to dream
I saw it all, the house, the scene, his form
Wasted and old, the thin long-bearded face,
And lean clenched hands, the lad beside the bed

Filling his faithful tablets; nay, at whiles,
So near and clear the vision draws itself,
I could wellnigh persuade me that I heard
The very words, and but restore them thus:

“ My work is done; this left hand that could trace
With one sure sweep, and rapid as a hawk
Falls plumb upon a partridge out of heaven,
A flawless circle, so that compasses
Could find nor dent nor bulge in its true line,
Now wavers and betrays me; yesterday
I all but marred my John the Baptist's smile,
And wrenched the delicate curve of light that lay
Along a tress of Dionysus' hair.
Thank God and Christ, whom I have loved and
served,

I have not touched through these my failing years
My Monna Lisa; she remains; her death
Stayed us; and as it left her, and left me,
So doth her portrait stand; enough, perchance,
Attained of what was unattainable,
Enough drawn forth from the pellucid depths
Of that abysmal nature I half knew,
Like sea spoils lifted in a diver's hand,

To show what treasures lay ungarnered there.

“To brush and pencil, then, a long farewell;
Nor less to those, my rival dreams, the half,
Perchance e’en more, of this my cumbered soul;
Schemes, visions, as in giant pictures seen,
Of mighty seas conjoined, and distant streams
Given wedlock, for the service of mankind
And fame immortal of far-sighted kings:
Nay more, of days when men, caparisoned
For flight contemptuous of the eagle’s range,
Should compass sea and land, and make the bounds
Of our engirdled planet neighbourly
As Florence and Fiesole.

Last night

I woke, and to me waking all seemed clear;
I stared into the dark, and cried, ‘I hold
The terms of the long problem; ’tis achieved!
Mankind shall have the pinions, that shall raise
His race to meet the angels, and shall owe
The measureless advancement unto me.’

“I rose, and lit the lamp, and seized the pen;
But straightway all was blurred; the figures danced
Like momes upon the sheet before me; soon
My head fell forward, and I saw no more.

So then, ye joint possessors of my soul,
Science and Painting, both of you, farewell;
The seats wherein ye sat are yours no more,
The halls that ye have held are empty now,
And, swept and garnished after you, they wait
The coming of their last incomer, Death!

“I am a man about whom men have lied
More largely than their wont is; I have borne
The hate of many, gained the love of few.
Yet gave I never hate for hate, or lie
For lie; but love for hate, and truth for lies,
Were ever my one answer and sole balm.
But, for I held the secret of mine Art
A mystery, and wrought, by means unguessed,
For consummation loftier than their own,
Nor loved to clog and cumber with strong meats
And fiery drinks that body, which I deemed
The casket of my soul, and would subject
To temperance, and light and cleanly fare;
Nay more, because I lived in solitude
Loving fair Nature and the face of Night,
And at a table in an oriel set,
Making my lamp the comrade of her stars,
Would work and gaze from twilight unto dawn,

Keeping no noisy company, they dowered
God's enemy with His good gifts to me;
Proclaimed me sorcerer, calling all to dread
Contagion from the renegade, and loathe
The outcast who had made his pact with Hell.
Then, for I no less loved sweet Purity,
Nor breathed there woman of the wanton breed
Could claim to call me hers, or lard men's tongues
With tales of me, they did not spare to throw
Bespattering hints of nameless infamy
On the poor few who loved me and whom I loved.
Yet hath God shielded me, and flung their spite
Back from me like the spume of baffled seas;
Nor ever Pope, or Pope's Inquisitor,
How deft soe'er the instigation poured
Into their cruel and compliant ears,
Hath dared the crime of laying a hand on me.

“Thus have I lived on with so much of peace
As they have who have surely learned the truth
That he alone who lives alone can live
Sole warder of his soul; but he, being such,
Doth hold, as God's Vicegerent, under sway
A region broader than the broadest realm,
And happier than the happiest, so its space

Be barred to pride, and open to that love
Which neither takes infection from without,
Nor limitation from the countless frowns
Of many-browed malevolence, but sits
Changeless, serene, and unprovokable,
As knowing that to barter enmities
Savours revenge, whereunto he who stoops,
Walks of his own free will debased, and bound
E'en to his chariot wheels who injured him.

“ Yet, ere I turn mine eyes from this bright world,
And step from my last sunset into night,
I will not pause, nor leave the truth half told.
I felt the sting of Buonarotti's hate,
Young Raphael's neglect, Pope Leo's slights,
And cold dismissal of the Roman folk,
And Soderini's flouts which I deserved;
He hit the fault within me; I have lived
O'er much in mine own life; played fast and loose
With custom, and too timorous of the end,
Have hung between conception and its goal,
Refusing to acknowledge in due time
The touch that should have seemed, and been, the
last.

Perchance I was not fated to achieve,

Because I was not faithful to fulfil,
And could not bring a fretful soul to treat
My covenanted work as other men
Hold to a bargain sealed; yet not the less
Gave I far more than any covenant
Could claim for answer. Still, I fall, half-famed,
"Twixt what I did and what I did not. Nought,
Or little else than nought, will last of him

- To keep the sinking Leonardo's head
On the sleek surface of the seas of Time.
 " Bellini, Botticelli, and the rest,
Vannucci, and Carpaccio, even he
Who taught me, old Verrocchio, all wrought
With honest purpose in the bounds of knowledge,
Contented not to dream; their sturdy works
Shall show a goodly company, and live,
Fair warrant of their fame, while mine e'en now
Are perishing with him who wrought on them.
My "Cena" rots upon that reeking wall
Of the Maria delle Grazie;
The clay of my "Colossus" is no more;
Ere I could stamp it in eternal bronze,
It made the horse-play of those rabble French
Who drove my Ludovico out of Milan;

What they of Florence may have left to show
My rendering of their fight at Anghiari,
I ne'er shall know; perchance Gonzaga yet
Hangs my presentment of his Isabel
In Mantua; thanks to Dame Margherite,
Who bent her royal brother's mocking heart
To her sweet way, I have my "Baptist" still,
And "Bacchus," those twin shadows of one type,
Wherein the world's old worship meets the new;
And into each of which perchance is wrought
Something, I scarce know what or how, of her
Who sits with Holy Mary up in Heaven,
And reigns with her within this broken heart,
Doubling religion to me. 'Twixt both those
She hangs, my saint, in that imperfect guise
She blessed, and so made perfect, when to me,
Who would have still thrust back the end, she said,
Laying a hand divine on this weak arm,
'Nay, touch it not again, it needs no more.'

"Alas, that summer's afternoon, which closed
The three sweet years wherethrough I painted her;
And found from week to week, and month by month,
While I wrought on in joy and wonderment,
Some unexpected beauty to undo

What I had done, abash content, and drive—
Albeit despair shook on my finger tips—
My painter's soul to phrenzy, and o'erwhelm
My man's heart in love's measureless abysm.
I was as one who on a mountain side
Climbing, point above point, pauses, and sees
Fresh loveliness; new folding of the hills,
New cleavage of the sky by clustered pines,
Multiplied outlines of unlooked-for peaks,
Cataracts reframed, unwonted sunlights sweeping
Shades from the lower valleys; she sat there,
Gazing great-eyed far into the unseen,
As Nature's self incomprehensible,
With form and colour of perpetual change,
And deeps that change itself could never sound.

“Alas, that summer's afternoon; she came,
And that once only, to my house alone.
I worked in silence, for I knew one word
Had been a tempest that had rent apart
The veil that was between us, and I feared
To look into her eyes behind the veil.
Ah, what if I had spoken! If the love,
The buried love in both of us, had burst
The wintry soil of silence, and sprang forth—

As sprang Athene from the brows of Zeus—
No bud, but the full tree, stem, flower, and fruit,
Stem fair, flower fairer, bitter fruit perchance,
And poisonous in the plucking. Lisa, Lisa,
Could it be well to pay the fatal price,
And buy the right to call thee by thy name!

“She rose; and I rose with her, took her hand,
Outstretched for parting; over it I bowed,
Bowed low and kissed it; while it shook, I felt
Her lips, like rose-leaves lighting, touch my hair.
So stayed I till the shock had ceased in me;
Then I looked up, but she was gone.

That night

I rode for Prato; and the morrow placed
The first gray fold of Apennine between
Mine eyes and that dead city, empty grown,
And worthless as a sea-shell on the shore,
Now she and I were gone; she south, I north;
She to Calabria and her death, and I
To wait for mine as I am waiting now.
Had she been free, my God, had she been free!
E'en so, had it been well? Should I have died
As now, enshrouded in celestial light
Of her unsullied splendour, without taint

Of time, unsmirched by custom, e'en perchance
By disillusion, such as hovereth
O'er passion's deathbed; glory undefiled
Streaming from Paradise; no sickly gleam
Such as our life might gender at its close,
Like fires that flit o'er stagnant marshes, bred
Of festering degradation and decay."

And here I have it that he ceased, and lay
Long time in silence with closed eyes, as though
He would recall the course of the mute love
That came so late into his lonely life;
The granite hardness of his great resolve,
Grown harder as he faced it, day by day,
And month by month, through those tempestuous
years;
The iteration of his self-constraint,
When rays of her unspoken love brake forth,
Disclosing glimpses of life's mountain peaks,
To leave its low-set plains more drear; and all
The desolation of his wifeless home,
Now worse than void, a haunted solitude,
A graveyard with a single ghost for tenant,
Where Duty with her stern and pallid brows,

Confronting each monotonous return,
Sat ever by the chill unguarded hearth.
Such was his retrospect; no memories
Of joy; alternate longing and recoil,
A clash of flux and reflux, two fierce tides
In conflict without sequel to the end.

So passed the hours until the sun's full orb
Showed at the central window; the strong light
Beat in upon the current of his thought,
Like a great sound on silence; his dim eyes
He raised, and with a self-accusing smile,
Half pardon, half reproach, but all benign,
As for indulgence given to his own soul
In one more recollection ere he died,
With effort he half turned his languid head
To Melzi, murmuring, "Go, Francesco mine,
Bring me thy lute, and once more sing to me,
Softly, as fits an echo of the past,
My song, 'Chiami tu?' whereof I think
Thou never knewest the meaning until now."

So spake he; and the ready boy arose,
And went and came, and stood below the bed,
Handling the strings, mute, waiting for a sign;
But when the dying master faintly raised

Re-opened eyes on him, and whispered "Now,"
He struck one note of passionate appeal,
And, after a low prelude, sang, as bidden:

Art calling, as I too call,
For the tears that will not be shed,
Like rains that refuse to fall
Upon lands that with drought are dead?

Art sighing, as I too sigh,
For the loss that we may not own,
The waste of the years gone by,
While we were alone, alone?

Art turning, as I too turn,
From the peril of each farewell,
From the breath of the hopes that burn
Like airs from the gate of Hell?

Art naming, what I too name,
The wreck of the treason and fall,
The rage and the gnash of shame,
And the longing that mocketh at all?

Thus far the boy; but broke off suddenly,
With a quick cry, from his unfinished song;
And cast aside his lute, and flung him down
Upon his knees beside the bed; he saw,
E'en as he sang, o'er the great painter's face
That colour creep which death alone can paint.
The old man, as himself had said, was passing
From that last sunset into night; perchance,
His hour had come unhastened, or perchance,
Too smart a strain of recollection snapped
The fretted strings upon his lute of life,
And so he died; one moment ere his end
He raised himself a little from the bed;
His closed eyes opened objectless; he stretched
Lean arms and hands along the coverlet,
Crying, "'Tis come, she comes, and all is won!
My Lisa, mine, mine, mine! And wings, the wings!
They shall be ours and theirs!" Then fell back, dead.

EPILOGUE.

ONCE more—speaking in words half spoken
Such as fell on the Tuscan's ears,
Feeble, faint of a calm scarce broken
Down the current of silent years,

While he walked with the Four who greeted
Theirs, that Fifth who had brought him there,
Sweet and grave, amid thousands seated,
Grave as they in sublime despair—

Voices came, as of souls recalling
What their warfare on earth had been,
Fast, and vigil, and fear of falling,
Durance, trust in the vast Unseen;

Tenderly, as to a sweet thought clinging,
Touching chords of a grief long gone,
Songs, in solitude sung, resinging,
Now together as once alone:

“Who are these who are walking, walking,
Ever walking in ways of dream,
Mute amid myriads vainly talking,
Souls that are, amid shades that seem?

“Sealed their lips by a power that knoweth
Doom to lurk in a word or sigh,
Doom of the wild-rose bud that showeth
Petals rash to a scorching sky.

“Dream, ay, dream; ’tis the waking, waking,
Waking only that havoc wills,
Wills, and joys, as a land-storm breaking
All the peace of a thousand hills.”

Ceased their delicate, air-borne, measure;
While, or ever the silence fell,
Passed they, breathing a breath of pleasure
O’er Heaven’s lilies and asphodel.

TO A NIGHTINGALE IN JUNE.

SWEET bird, thou wast singing
In April and May,
With half the dull village
Asleep through thy lay,
While I who, unsated,
By night or by day,
Had hungered to listen,
Was far, far away.

Yet sing to me still, sweet,
Albeit 'tis June,
The last of the notes left
In thy broken tune,
Oh sing, ere thou leavest,
Alas, all too soon,
These glades, and me with them,
To yon lonely moon.

To a Nightingale in June. 159

Yes, tuneless and lonely
 The gloaming will be,
And midnight, and dawning,
 To watchers like me,
Who feed upon fancies
 In hearkening to thee,
And dream what the spring time
 We knew not could be.

Those midnights, those midnights,
 What must they have been,
When April was passing,
 And thou wast first seen,
And moonbeams were greeting,
 With passionate sheen,
The full song that brake through
 Thy covert of green.

Like streams held asunder,
 Sweet songster, are we,
That knew not each other's
 Glens, mountains, and glee,

160 *To a Nightingale in June.*

But sparkling no longer,
 Or joyous, or free,
Meet down in bare lowlands
 In sound of the sea.

Alas for the chances
 That prey upon fate,
More deadly than error,
 More ruthless than hate;
They grave on that portal,
 Which should be joy's gate,
A doom past redeeming,
 "Too late, 'tis too late."

BLOTTED LIVES

BLOTTED LIVES.

IT was an upland lawn, whose ancient elms
 Frowned on ambitious and obtrusive pines,
 That clove a prospect of fair-timbered meads,
 Where happier oaks, by modern rivalries
 Unvexed, still held to their domain; above,
 Set on an unwall'd terrace, rose, o'ergrown
 With broideries of crimson creeping vine,
 The low-browed features of a country house
 In lines of unpretentious comfort. There,
 Through those short hours of sinking charm that
 make

Of autumn afternoons a sigh for summer,
 In a long hammock, stretched from bole to bole
 Of mingling elms, all gay with knot and fringe,
 And rich with silken cushion and strewn furs,
 A lady lay close-wrapped; beside her sat
 A lad who might have seen his twentieth year,
 And at her feet an older man, whose years

Outnumbered hers; for her, she was indeed
Past youth—the seated stripling was her son—
But not past loveliness, albeit both frail
And fading; grace of line she had, a wealth
Of silvery braids from her veined temples waved,
And on her cheeks and lips belated lay
Traces of bygone freshness; poor pinched flowers,
Such as outstay the last autumnal glow,
Or like chance tints on ruined panels whence
Full hues have flown, or those regretful notes
That linger in the nightingales of June,
And thinly haunt the groves once steeped in sound.
Thus lying there, she seemed—so sweet her charm
Of delicate decline—a freak of chance
Set down to make a human counterpart,
Through the last hours of a September sun,
At once both of the season and the day.

Long had she lain as if alone, half-turned
With sunlit features to the lustrous west,
In troubled meditation; while the boy
Sat gazing on her; his blue eyes, fair hair,
And flush of girlish rose on oval cheeks,
Had caught reflection from his mother's beauty;
More, in his wistfulness, for all his youth,

He bore the impress of a settled pain,
That took its pattern from her melancholy;
It was a look of tremulous quest, wherein
'Twixt fascination and repulsion poised,
As 'twixt opposing orbs some tortured moon,
He seemed to ask for what he feared to know.

The elder man sat still and watched the pair;
They were the only beings on the earth
He loved, save for that general charity,
Which was as breath to him, to draw in love
From all things round, man, nature, and the sense
Of omnipresent Godhead, and, inhaled,
To render it again, as do the leaves
Of some great tree through multitudinous spores
Draw nurture from the broad and bounteous air,
To feed it in their turn; so bent, so dowered,
His was among the rarest of rare souls;
To all the stalwart forces of a man
He joined a woman's meek submissiveness
To spiritual pain; from boyhood on,
Through all the chances of a life set thick
With peril and endurance, he had borne,
Without an effort to displace the load,
The burden of an unrequited love,

As he had been a woman; gentle, mute,
Content to look upon the happiness
Of her he loved, and upon his, the friend
Loved all the more that she had chosen him.
His voice was full, and e'en beyond his speech
Showed purpose; modest in his port he was,
But firm withal; well-favoured, and well-knit,
Though slim and slight of frame; whate'er he did,
How trivial soe'er the act might be,
He did with effortless and affluent grace,
Unconscious of distinction; there he sat,
Cross-legged, between cigar and fishing-rod,
With no more taint of common clumsiness,
Than sits, with his clasped blade athwart his knees,
That marble wonder which we moderns call
"The Ludovisi Mars"; a soldier too
Of no mean record, with a heart as staunch
As the good weapon he had worn so well.

They made a goodly group of noble types;
A woman who had braved undauntedly,
With bleeding heart and lacerated pride,
The direst thorns of agony, to pluck
The joy's fruit of her life ~~from~~ love from their midst.
A man of silent suffering, who had wrought

With hardihood of spirit enough to put
Full half the happier souls of men to shame.
A boy, of princely mettle, yet untried,
But with those markings of the mint that stamp
A being of promise who aspires to be.
And in the midst of them, unseen, but owned
By all, in their own fashion, as they felt
The sunlight and the coming up of eve,
One dead man's presence who had shaped their
lives.

Slowly the lady turned her round, and said,
“Dear friend, the time has come when he should
know

What cloud it was that settled on us all
Through those indelible years, but which at last
The warm breath of God's mercy breathed away.”
Then he, the elder, pausing ere he spoke;
“Shall we then leave you, he and I, awhile?”
But she; “Not so, 'twere best that I should hear;
Something there might be that I cared to say,
Or he; and which said now, all would be done,
And we need never speak of it again.”
With this she turned her to the west once more
And o'er her face her kerchief spread with care

And waited; calmness reigned around the three;
Not a leaf stirred, and not a sound was heard,
Save here and there out of the ilices
A starling spoke, or to his drowsier mates
A sleek gray pigeon cooed about the lawn.
“So be it, as you wish, and in plain words,”
After a little while the elder said;
And suddenly, as rushing at a breach,
“Your father’s youth was shadowed by a crime”;
Then—for he heard the boy’s arrested breath—
He laid a hand upon his arm, and said;
“’Twas not of those for which men have no pardon.
His mother had a waiting-woman, one
We need not stay to pity overmuch;
She was his elder, the first fault was hers;
She tempted him; he fell. But from his sin
He got small pleasure; horror soon drove out
The alien passion from his virgin soul,
And let repentance in; he forced the girl
To leave his mother’s service; then because
His innocence believed her innocent,
Save for his fault, as he was, save for hers,
He magnified her wrong a hundredfold,
And multiplying his debt to mate with it,

O'erpaid both greatly; she well-pleased, well-dowered,
With no more bitter fruit to bear than shame,
And that perchance in her was scant enough,
Soon wrote that she was married in her class,
And lightly prated of a happy home,
Her future, and his generosity.

“He turned once more to his own purity,
And nought of festering sequel stayed in him
Of that malignant fever; though at whiles
Recurrent memory like an ague seized
His spirit, and he would shake with agony,
And shudder, more at his own shame than hers.

“At length upon his life, now bright once more,
Your mother rose, like sunlight over dawn;
I, who had known them both so long, foreknew
That each would be to th' other as a fate;
And so it proved; before that season's close
Their coming marriage was announced; it raised
More genuine pleasure through the London camps
Than they are prone to; but, alas, the news
Pierced to that dismal spot where worthlessness
In wife and husband both had hurried both,
By mutual attraction, down the steep
Of degradation; spendthrift, drunken, he,

And she, coarse, tawdry, shameless; the vile pair,
With all the readiness of villainy,
Composed at once their hourly jars to hatch
A plot to turn the tidings to account.
She wrote a rambling scrawl of vulgar whine
Over the old love she could not forget,
Their money losses from imprudent trust,
Their present penury; and how, alas,
Her husband, who knew all the past, had turned,
Under the sting of their ill-fortune, first
From kindness to a taunting petulance,
And thence to cruelty; how her one chance
Of comfort lay in him whom she had loved
So truly; if he only would once more—
She felt full well how generous he had been—
Raise them to competence, securing all
From further waste, she felt she might regain
Something like quiet; all her hopes of more
Having died the day he left her. Every word
Was of their joint concoction; I saw through
The letter to the scheme that lay behind
Of lifelong torture and extortion; he
Saw too, but in his tenderness of soul
Would fain have yielded; I confess, I forced

Refusal on him, and my counsel brought,
It may be, the catastrophe; and yet,
Were it to give again, I still should give it.
Threats followed on his answer; wearied out,
I proffered mediation; they would treat
With none save him; I should have left them still
To wreak their worst, and trusted a great love
To stand confession of the early fault
So long repented and so soon atoned.
But in an evil hour, unknown to me,
Bent, as he said, on sifting all the truth,
He sought them in their mean unlovely lair;
She was all tears and scruples, but the man,
In whom the demon drink had housed anew,
First rough, then insolent, made half pretence
Of fearing that their visitor had hoped
To find his wife alone; then working round
From simulated rage to phrenzy, heaped
Claim upon claim, and crowded threat on threat,
Made bolder by your father's self-restraint,
Until he reeled across, and fronting him,
Hissed out some foul suggestion in his ear
About your mother; as a lightning flash
Blazed forth the doom that he had dared too far;

Your father's fingers closed about his throat
Like a steel circlet, and with one wild shake,
The beast was hurled headlong across his den;
Too surely slain; he neither cried nor stirred;
His slayer sprang to raise him, but, alas,
Too fell had been the force of those fierce hands;
One quiver of the limbs, and he was gone.

“The day of trial came; we all were there,
His captain, every subaltern, and I,
Though not of his battalion; half the court
Was filled with sorrowing friends, who came to bring
What comfort there might be in grief and love;
His sad eyes wandered once along our lines,
From bench to bench, then fell; and so he stayed.
Till suddenly, as by some instinct stung,
He looked up to a little gallery,
That opened on a corner of the court,
Where stood alone, black robed, and deeply veiled,
One whom I need not name; his parted lips,
A spasm that was almost a cry, his hands
Clenched on the rail before him, showed us all
What he had seen, though not a single eye
Among us turned her way: I saw the change
Which that one look had wrought; with a calm voice

He made his plea; his single advocate,
A serious and tactful gentleman,
Urged what was fitting, and the sentence came.
I could have blest the judge who spared us all
Unnecessary unction; simply said,
With full weight of judicial dignity,
That all the circumstances, sad and strange,
E'en novel to his long experience,
Warranted leniency, and imprisonment—
I drew a freer breath to hear its term—
Not very brief, nor yet unduly long
For justice on the taker of a life.

“ We all rose up as he was led away,
Thus making our unspoken farewells; he
Had eyes alone for that small gallery,
Where she still stood; she slowly raised her veil,
And as he passed he saw, and I saw too,
Her look of unextinguishable love,
And pity, and a flicker of the lips,
That was nor speech nor smile, though kin to both;
A spiritual ray, that was to be
A lantern on his pathway through the abysm,
A gleam unquenchable by any gloom,
A beacon, shown in heaven, to stay his soul,

And draw him upwards through the night, until
He stood once more in the full light of day.

“At last the weary summit of the months
Was overpast, and to our jubilant ears
The sudden word of a remission came ;
The prisoner's conduct, which had won for him
Much mitigation in the deadening round
Of convict life, some failure of his health,
And, more than all perhaps, his story told
With greater fullness, had combined to gain
This boon of respite. It so chanced that I
Was then in London on a six months' leave
After long sickness in Bengal ; the news
Came in a letter from the Governor
Of Milbank Jail, where he lay waiting me.
Half-mad I drove to fetch him, passed within
The dreary portal, with a shout made known
My errand to the gaping gate-keeper,
Outstripped a proffered guide, who called aloud,
Turn to the right, or left, I scarce heard which,
Rushed on, far more by luck than judgement hit
The way, and burst into a waiting-room
Where he, half-fainting, tottered to my arms.

“We passed some weeks in quiet seaside haunts,

And on high breezy moors, till body and mind
Had taken something of their olden tone.
The past we left to bury its own dead,
The future made our sole concern; this house
Was to be let; he would not have it closed;
A blight, he said, would settle on the place,
If left to solitude and emptiness.
His old profession gone, the stain on him
So recent and so deep, he must begin
His life anew in some far colony.
All this in truth I had foreseen, arranged,
And he with scarcely renovated will,
Of very feebleness accepted all
My plans for him. New Zealand was our goal,
Where—so I told him truly—I had friends
Who farmed a tract 'neath those broad-belted Alps
Whose sunnier spurs, spread to the cheerful East,
Slope slowly towards the Canterbury plains,
With scrub-bespattered down and grassy flat,
Made many by the shingle-hindered streams,
That, looped and baffled, round a thousand curves
Bear their vexed volume to its rest below.
There might he settle for some years at least;
And health and peace and wealth and happiness

Grow, like his flocks around him. All this while
No word about your mother passed our lips;
Though well I knew that her name spelt for him
Wealth, peace, and happiness; but I knew too
That honour kept him mute, and that he deemed
Atonement, like the mountain range we sought,
Must lie beyond wide plains of patient waiting.

“We made a happy, swift, and healthful voyage;
And as we neared our port, I gazed with pride
At his bright eyes, bronzed cheeks, and well-filled
frame,

As on achievements of my own. We found
A letter from my friend awaiting us,
Bidding us purchase horses, packs, and tent
To make what, should the rivers rise, might prove
A four, ay five day's journey to his home;
'Twas shearing time; he could not leave the sheds
To fetch us out; his niece, he said, kept house,
One in a thousand; he could promise us
Good beds, good country victuals, and good wine;
A landscape beyond praise, sleek flocks and herds;
A model homestead's cheery sights and sounds;
Days of health-giving labour, nights of sleep;
Perpetual welcome, boundless liberty.

“’Twas on a glorious November noon,
Well worth its fellows of our northern May,
When first the Station came in sight, high perched
Behind a wooded headland; in our front
Lay a wide stream that sparkled, as with joy
To see the meeting of two human hearts;
Uncle and niece were riding down the track,
To greet us at the ford; their amble changed
To a smart canter over the sound turf
Through which the river ran: I glanced at him;
His eyes were straining, and his lips apart;
Half a mile off he knew her. ‘Courage, man!’
Said I, for he was quaking like a leaf,
And scarce could sit his horse; ‘don’t shake like
that!

Depend upon it she won’t! She it is,
And he, her mother’s brother, and our host.’
Somehow, I did not see them meet; perhaps
She checked her horse, and he pressed on to her,
While I was busy greeting my old friend;
But when I turned to her I saw a face
As of an angel mother who had found
The soul of her lost child.”

The speaker paused;

And then he added, "Well, no need for more.
After some weeks, despatches came, which told
Of trouble imminent in Hindoostan;
I must rejoin the colours; 'twas the first
Low thunder of that Sepoy storm which swept
From Indus to the Vindya. I went off
To Delhi and to Lucknow and the rest,
And left them to their lifelong happiness."

Then, knowing he had ceased, the lady snatched
The kerchief from her face impetuously;
And rising on one arm, brake forth, and cried,

"Nay, nay, I do need more, and it is this!
He left us in the early summer dawn,
This noblest of the noble among men,
Whom, next to God, my husband and myself
Revered, and, next to one another, loved.
We would not have him start alone, so rose
Before the daylight, greatly sorrowing,
As they of Ephesus of old for Paul,
To think that we might see his face no more;
And all of us, my uncle and we two,
Rode with him to the second ford, and there
Made our reluctant parting; as his horse
Stood on the water's edge, our farewells done,

He drew his rein, and gazed around on all,
The bushy hills behind us, and over these
The lean bare-shouldered ranges, and the peaks
That gleamed, snow-tinted, many miles away,
Along the river, and o'er the shimmering plains;
As though he would stamp deep upon his heart
That picture of our home, to give him joy,
When far away in peril or in toil;
Then raising high his hat above his head,
He bared his brows to Heaven's full light, and cried,
In a quick rush of reverential joy,
An ecstasy of self-oblivion,
'Oh all ye works of His, bless ye the Lord,
Praise Him, and magnify His Name for ever!'
So 'mid the silence rode he through the ford;
We watched him for awhile, though well we knew
He would not look our way again; and then,
With a deep gloom upon us, turned for home."

So she, as though she needs must chronicle
The utmost tittle of his nobility;
He, all the while she spoke, sat still, and looked
Unutterable sadness; then he rose,
Shouldered his rod, and as he had gone forth
Into that lonely vastness of strange plains,

His sacrifice achieved, so now he turned
Across the lawn, and through a wicket gate
Passed riverwards; they watched him disappear
Over the shoulder of the dropping mead;
Saw him a moment more as he passed through
The garden and its orchard to the stream;
But he turned not, e'en as he had not turned
At that old parting, when he set his face
To bear what he had borne and still must bear.

The boy then clasped the lady in his arms,
And whispered, "Oh, sweet mother, it is well;
I feared e'en worse. God guard him for us, mother;
And may he bless us both, and keep me pure."
With one great sob the lady rose, and so
Mastered her soul; then, linking arm in arm,
Mother and son,—the silence, that had hung
As a dark veil between them, torn away—
Turning their backs on the now vacant west,
Walked homeward in the peaceful afterglow.

OLD AGE.

TO grasping Time no debt of tears is owed;
 Our years are milestones and our lives one
 stage,

The first we wot of, on an endless road

That mounts and broadens on from age to age.

Death's hand but bids the turning of a page

In that vast book, whose leaves are numberless,
 But closed alike to simpleton and sage,

Till rings the mandate which few dare to bless,

"Read on!"—and we sink back too blind for thank-
 fulness.

Oh for the courage to encounter change!

Some would not shrink then, as a herd that cowers
 Below the shoulder of a mountain range,

From whose dread crests a doom of tempest
 lowers;

Nor others mope and whine o'er waning powers;

Nor we, who would be singers to the last,
Spin dirges over half-forgotten hours,
Albeit the present we thus overcast
Could break in smiles of light worth all the cloudy past.

The earth is not less young than yesterday,
Our yesterday, which means when we were young;
Gay waters dance, winds whisper, sunbeams play,
The thrush and nightingale still boast a tongue;
About our ears their melodies are flung;
The olden hum of noon is in the air;
From flowery hearts the meadow scents are wrung;
The world is happy still, the world is fair,
Its thousand voices cry, "We all are what we were,

"Then why not ye!" I am and mean to be!
Why not, why not? What answer, comrade mine?
Doth not great Nature's call appeal to thee?
Let those soft orbs with resolution shine;
My youth of soul dependeth upon thine;
Two pairs of eyes must gaze upon the sun;
Joint ears must catch the morning music fine,
And reap the silence of the twilight dun;
Two hearts must beat out thanks in grateful unison.

Still do the lingering sunbeams in thine hair

O'erarch the dreamy moonlight of thine eyes;

Outstretched at ease upon yon long low chair,

Come, sit, and muse, and gaze on earth and skies;

And we will tell what might be loving lies,

Were we young puppets whom the cynic Fate

Could dangle in a dance of perjuries,

But being as we are, she is too late,

Each may be sure of each, and smile on her, and
wait—

What? That same summons to "read on," and turn

Her mystic page that draweth to an end;

One barb she hath, she will not let us learn

The opening lines together; oh, sweet friend,

What matters it? 'Tis but a little bend,

A sudden winding in the way, that hides

The fellowship it cannot e'en suspend,

It is but eye from eye she thus divides,

Not soul from soul, them Immortality abides.

I have a heart of temper still to love

A rose, a woman, or a nightingale;

To gaze, as eagles gaze, around, above,

Through the wide azure as they soar or sail;
To joy in morning bland or evening pale;
Old Age I feel not as a flaw or blot;
I take Death as a deer o'erleaps a rail;
'Tis but a flash, a transformation, not
Eclipse, but one quick pulse that starts anew man's
lot;

I know not how, and pause not to inquire,
Where answer there is none; that much I know;
I will not plunge a footstep in the mire
Of smirching speculation; what we sow
That shall we sometime reap; in every row
Our seventy seasons plant we doubtless fling
Tares by the million; may the grain or so
Of wheat o'erweigh them, when the scales shall
swing
To Mercy's gentle touch at the great harvesting.

Then take the world's wide welcome to the last;
Laugh, and tell all things we are young as they,
And young shall be when they are of the past;
For truly they are doomed to pass away;
This universe of stars shall float one day

Blind frozen wrecks upon a boundless sea,
Dark space the tomb to cloak their mute decay ;
And life, our life, apart, be life set free ;
They heritors of Time, we of Eternity.

SONGS

SONGS.

A CRADLE SONG.

SWING, swing, my cradle, swing
 Slightly, oh slightly;
 Cot, pole, and curtain-ring,
 Slightly were rightly,
 E'en did this dainty thing
 Sleep not so lightly,
 By night and day.

Ample eyes, brow severe,
 Laden with thunders;
 Whence didst thou wander here,
 Wonder of wonders?
 What from thy primal sphere
 The veil that sunders
 Thee and me, say?

We but God's servants were
Bid to receive thee;
Serfs to whose earthly care
Seraphs did leave thee;
What means that regal stare?
Doth this aggrieve thee?
Why dost thou frown?

Doth thy great heart despise
Mother's poor singing,
Pride bred in statelier skies
Still to thee clinging?
Or doth some vast surmise
With its upspringing
Bend thy brows down?

Mind is a fast fast steed,
Marvel a faster;
How swift soc'er her speed,
Marvel flies past her;
Who shall thy riddle read?
Not I, my master;
Sphinx of thy day!

Closed those wide eyes of his,
 So grave, so simple;
E'en while I gather this
 Lace for his wimple;
I dare not stoop to kiss
 One rosy dimple;
 Sleep, sleep, away!

What if my tears bedew
 An old-world pleasure?
What if I hail as new
 An old-world treasure?
Sing, as if sung by few,
 A well-worn measure
 Outwearing Time?

Still may a mother see
 God's Angels flocking
To this fresh mystery,
 Her cradle's rocking;
Still with sure heart may she
 Mock cynics mocking
 Her tears and rhyme!

EVENING.

LIGHT is failing, and colour waning,
Well, the day has been long and fair
Mar not we with a note of plaining
Earth's content as she lieth there.

Just ere dawn did we gaze and listen,
Leaning over your window-cill;
Watched the first rim of gray cloud glisten
Through yon pines on our eastern hill.

Caught the earliest male-bird's twitter
'Mid the laurel, as half in fear,
Calling low to his cosy sitter,
"Wake, my dearest, the morn is here."

Soon, as streams, on the eve of breaking,
Steal, to the last inert and still,
Then leap suddenly, foaming, shaking
Down the rifts of a rocky hill,

So the flood of the morn reviving,
Multitudinous, eager, ran;
Hunger, passion, and joy, and striving,
All the stress of the day began.

Shared we not in the toil and splendour,
Followed noon to her hard-won rest,
Watched day turn, as with eyes grown tender,
Matron-like, to the sober west?

All remembering, nought regretting,
Turn we, too, to the verge, and gaze
Far beyond on that unseen setting
Flushed with promise of endless days.

MOBILE E DIFFICILE.

FROWNS, like a fleecy cloud
 Braiding an azure noon,
 Tears, like a shower in June,
 Lasting no longer;
 Smiles, that make morn a shroud,
 Stern lips, that grant no leave,
 Whispering without reprieve,
 “I am the stronger.”

These be the sum of all
 Thou art to many a swain,
 Who to revenge their pain,
 Love to defame thee;
 But what they moodish call,
 I with a loyal sigh,
 Own is full maidenly,
 Nor will I blame thee.

Yet, though thou floutest me,
Well could'st thou love, I trow,
Else would those eyes not glow,
As I have seen them;
So, when in days to be
Thy will to yield inclines,
Write, though demure the lines,
I'll read between them.

- EYES.

G RAY, brown, or hazel,
Were they, or blue?
What the true tint of them
I never knew.

Plunged in a passion
Of sea-depths new,
Green, pearl, or golden,
Rose, azure, who,

Basking, and bathing,
Steeped through and through,
Would waste one moment
To mark their hue?

THE WASP.

A WASP crawls on my window-pane,
Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,
 He ne'er will sting or soar again;
Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

Too weakly grown for wrath or play,
Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,
 With scarce a life to take away;
Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

In summer fruits and summer flowers,
Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,
 His joys have been, no less than ours;
Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

He flitted, floated, sipped his fill,
Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,
 And now he feels October's chill;
Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

There is nought living but devours,

Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,

The poison of the honied hours;

Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

Now he must die, or he must keep,

Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,

A six months' solitude of sleep;

Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

Poor thing! And I must suffer too,

Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,

Heart-hunger all the winter through;

Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

Who knoweth if a Spring shall be,

Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,

Of life for him, of love for me;

Sing heigh ho, for the bonny days are over!

Ah come, ah come then, kindly Spring,

Call up again ~~*Alas, alas, the green corn and the clover,*~~

And say "My friend, you need not sing

Your '*Heigh ho for the bonny days are over!*'"

LOVE'S DAY.

LOVE waved his rosy torch
O'er our day's dawning,
Love's plumes athwart the noon
Spread us an awning;

Still on the Evening skies
His tints were glowing;
Night fell and I alone
Wept at his going.

DESERTED.

WHAT, art thou leaving me?
 Go not for shame!
 Would'st thou have perjury
 Writ o'er thy name?

Shame art thou bold to dare?
 Let then fear stay thee,
 Lest some more cruel fair,
 Forsaken, slay thee.

Gone! Take then this farewell,
 Once and for all;
 On thee from Heaven or Hell
 May vengeance fall!

A DREAM.

I DREAMED that I flung a stone
And called to the careless sea,
"To add to thy thousands one,
Take this, it is nought, from me."

But I woke with a cry and a start
As it sank far lost in the blue,
For what I had flung was my heart,
And the motionless deeps were you.

FAREWELL TO THE WETTERAU.

THE hour of farewell soundeth now,
 So, Wirthinn, vortreffliche Frau,
 I'll drink before I start to-morrow
 One last deep draught to the Wetterau.

Nay, drink thou too, oh hostess mine;
 'Tis thine own honest Rhenish wine;
 Each sip of thine evaded duty
 Imposes airs of excess on mine.

Oh sumptuous sweep of fenceless plain,
 Thy goodly breadths of amber grain,
 Thy scarf of varied green, thine orchards,
 I ne'er may hope to behold again;

Nor haunt thy choicer spaces where
 Rose-gardens steep the morning air,
 Like peasants rarely dowered transcending
 The bounds of kind in a beauty rare.

How have I learned as friends to greet
Each well-known wild flower that I meet,
 The dusty bees, the hissing crickets,
 And phrenzied grasshoppers at my feet,

Who start with fatuous bound and spring
From tufts of thyme and waxy ling,
 And sunwards spread for one wild moment
 The azure film of an elfin wing.

Where'er I mount thine easy hills
My soul with joy thy landscape fills,
 Thy woods, thy guardian fringe of mountains,
 Thy hamlets huddling about the rills;

Their vineclad walls with many a stain;
Geese trooping home by street and lane;
 And arch-spanned yards, a snug confusion
 Of dovecote, ladder, and loft and wain;

And low-browed, curtained casements set
With heliotrope and mignonette,
 'Neath slatey curves of roof and gable,
 That brave the hand of the spoiler yet.

204 *Farewell to the Wetterau.*

Alone, unvexed by prouder peers,
Its friendly crest thy Friedberg rears ;
 No peasant now from its staid turret
 A beacon sees or a tocsin hears.

For not less dead its feudal care
'Gainst chance of mediaeval scare,
 Than Roman ward in foss and agger
 We mark in Pfahlgraben here and there.

And vainly would its warders scan
Thy breadths in search of hostile clan,
 Where calm lies spread, and peace, and plenty
 For all that liveth, and e'en for man.

At trace and plough sleek horses strain,
Sleek milking mothers tug the wain ;
 And sleek the solid lads and lasses
 Who reap and gather the golden grain.

Thrice happy folk who plant, and till,
And work, and rest, and take your fill ;
 Your own the threshing-floor, the garner,
 Your own the grist of the busy mill!

Farewell to the Wetterau. 205

Your Autumn toils are wellnigh o'er;
The fatted lands lie brown; once more
Your welcome give to lamplit winter,
Made warm and full from an ample store.

Oh, that 'twere mine to see and sing
Your May and her apparelling,
Her fairy veil, and flowery kirtle
Of apple, cherry, and pear, in Spring.

Alas, my steps are homeward now;
To the good Rhenish God I bow;
My song is sung, His flask is empty;
Farewell, farewell to the Wetterau!

THE SINGER'S MISSION.

WHAT mission have I to the world, say'st
thou?

Nay none, perchance; more than yon hawthorn
tree,

That spreads its fragrant shows on every bough;

So 'tis, superior friend, I own, with me.

The oak, the elm, the cedar, and the pine,

Do loftier service through a longer day;

Still, 'tis the hawthorn's duty, and 'tis mine,

To bear our low-set blossoms as we may.

SUB FINE LABORUM.

WE talked on a seat in the shade,
 He leaned with his chin on a staff,
 And a smile on his countenance strayed,
 That was no way akin to a laugh,

As he said, with his eyes on the ground,
 "Your life has been simple and fine,
 Well piloted, healthily bound;
 And now for an outline of mine.

"I have lived in a world of my own,
 Low-lying, love-lighted, and clear,
 Out of which I have sauntered to town
 To make a few thousands a year.

"I have wrought, as my workfellows know,
 Far harder than most of my kind,
 And I hope I may leave, when I go,
 Some savour of credit behind.

“ I have spurned all political prigs,
 Their bluster, their froth, and foul play,
But I honour the Boucol who digs,
 And have done him some good in my day.

“ To yawn in a weed-plot of ‘isms’
 I never was largely inclined,
Through the sludge of new Systems and Schisms
 I have holden the skirts of my mind.

“ Yet I was not a cynic at worst,
 Nor is it, I pray you believe,
Iago alone who has curst
 Those who carry their hearts on a sleeve.

“ For my record of waste and regret,
 Stain, suffering, failure, and fault,
Let it slumber—the hour is not yet—
 Unopened in Memory’s vault.

“ Meanwhile, in this planet of strife
 I have not unavailingly striven,
And so, I give thanks for my life,
 In the Presence where thanks should be given.

“ Yet half of that life was a dream,
And sweetest the half that I stole
For the passion that still is supreme
In the thing I have meant by my soul.

“ But I loved not the mothers who fling
Their babies for wolves to devour,
Nor poets who dangle and string
Their songs to make sport for the hour.

“ Ye pages of pleasure and pain,
Loved scrolls of my creed and my tears,
Ye are Time’s to divulge or retain,
At his will, as he wieldeth the years.

“ For fame, I esteem it as nought ;
I stand with my withers unwrung ;
I shall die, well content to have wrought,
And ten times content to have sung.”

He ceased, and was silent awhile ;
Then, lifting his eyes from the ground,
Said “ Come for a stroll, just a mile,
There is time ere the dressing-bell sound.”

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